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CLAUDE CLINTON AND THE OBJECT OF THEIR CONVERSATION APPROACHED, AND THE LATTER WAS PRESENTED AS EVERARD AINSLIE.

Without a Heart; or, Walking on the Brink.

BY COLONEL PRENTISS INGRAHAM.

CHAPTER I. GOD'S REBUKE.

OVER hill and valley, over mountain and river, a shadow was creeping—but not the shadow of night, for the day was not far spent, and the sun had yet a long course to run ere its setting.

But the skies were overcast with flying clouds, the forerunners of the storm sweeping up from the east, and shielding the earth from sunlight, while the deep rumble of muffled thunder was borne ominously along on the wind, and echoed, like the roll of a hundred guns, among the mountain glens.

Surveying the scene of beauty, with the rushing river, reflecting back the storm-clouds, at her feet, and mountains rising far heavenward upon the other bank, stood a young girl, gracefully reclining against a huge moss-grown rock, to which was tied a small, rudely made skiff.

The maiden seemed lost in deep reverie, while her eyes were turned earnestly upon a massive stone structure, a mile up the river, and sheltered by the overhanging hill upon the other bank.

The face of the maiden, though bronzed by exposure, was strangely beautiful, while in the large, dark-blue eyes dwelt a weird look that was most fascinating.

The head was carried with a haughty pose, and every feature was perfect and stamped with conscious power, even though but seventeen years had touched with sunlight her golden hair.

Though clad in a coarse frock of home-spun, the form of the maiden displayed its perfect symmetry, and her every motion was one of yielding grace.

From the rock, against which the young girl leant, a path wound back through a picturesque glen, nestled in which, as if hiding from the din of the outside world, was a pretty cottage—the home of joy and contentment, it would seem, for that care and sorrow should ever cross the threshold of that lovely, but humble home, one could not believe.

Adown the pathway came a woman with quick and nervous step, a wiry form, and the sharp, disagreeable face of a scold, while her small, suspicious eyes snapped with anger.

Unobserved by the dreamer, she drew near the rock, and then her shrill tones cut the crisp air, causing the young girl to start, and her face to flush with anger.

"This is the way you do as I tell you, miss? Well, my life is a misery looking after you.

"An hour ago I told you to bring me some fish from the river, and you have not moved, and it is time for you to drive the cow home."

"I will go after the cow now, auntie," mildly replied the girl.

"Of course you will, and then you shall go out and fish upon the river, and—"

"A storm is coming up, and—"

"I have eyes, girl; but you are terribly afraid of a ducking—the storm won't hurt your clothes."

"No, but I might be drowned."

"And good for you if you was, for, except to stand here looking over at the University, you are good for nothing."

"Just let me catch any of those students sneaking round my home, and I guess they'll find it hot for them."

"I am certain they would—your presence would add heat to the devil's dominions," retorted the girl, stingingly, as her anger arose, and then, with a light laugh, she bounded away through the woods in search of the cow, which it was her duty to look after.

Still scolding, the woman retraced her way toward the cottage, while the girl hurried along the river-bank for a short distance, until she suddenly came upon an open space, bordered upon one side by a broad highway traversing the country.

As she was about to cross the opening, for the tinkling of a bell told her that the object of her search was not far distant, she started back and crouched down in the thicket, for, not fifty paces from her, she beheld a strange scene for that lonely spot, miles from village or town.

In the opening in the woods stood half a dozen men, and upon the face of each rested a gloomy shadow—not reflected thereon by the gathering storm-clouds, but the shadow of approaching evil.

It was a mysterious group, a sad scene, and one which the eye of no woman should ever rest upon, and which, to her dying day, ever haunted her memory, for the deed of that morning was one not to be idly banished from her thoughts.

Two of those six men were crouched upon the ground before open cases filled with glittering instruments, while two more conversed earnestly together and in low tones, as though they feared the winds might bear their words away, to carry sorrow and gloom into some far-away home.

The two principal figures in the six were, one pacing quickly to and fro, the other standing upright, his arms crossed upon his broad breast, his eyes cast down.

Both were persons who would attract attention in any assemblage, and yet very unlike each other, for one was a blonde, with the bluest eyes and the goldenest hair, and long, drooping mustache; the other the darkest brunette, with hair and beard and eyes as black as jet.

The face of the former was one that any woman or child would gaze into and trust; the face of the latter neither man, woman or child could read—it was hard, stern, and strikingly handsome.

Unnoticed herself, the young girl crouched down in the thicket, afraid to retreat, afraid to move, and with straining eyes gazed upon the scene, following each movement of each individual in the group.

That the shadow of death rested on them she knew, and her heart almost ceased beating when the two men who had been conversing together approached the two who were standing apart, and placed in their hands two long, glittering weapons of deadly look.

A few moments more, and the six men stood erect, the two who had most attracted the attention of the young girl face to face, and about fifteen paces apart—the others upon one side.

Then a silence fell upon all, and even the birds in the woods ceased their song, and only the angry roar of the distant tempest broke upon the ear, and all nature seemed hushed with dread.

An instant only, but an age of agony to all who were there, passed away, and then in metallic tones, like the voice of a destroying angel, cut forth the words:

"Gentlemen! are you ready?"

Each man, who stood there upon the brink of the grave, looking calmly into eternity, merely bowed assent, and again the crisp tones of the second cut the air with startling distinctness:

"Fire!"

But the flash of the pistols was unnoticed in the blinding glare of lightning that swept the scene—the crack of the weapons unheard in the terrific crash of heaven's artillery, while from its towering top to its rootlets a massive tree standing not far off was shivered by the stroke hurled upon it from the storm-clouds above.

With a cry of terror the maiden sunk forward upon the green sward, but ere her eyes closed in unconsciousness she beheld the dark-visaged man lying full length upon the ground, his forehead stained with life's crimson tide—his foe standing erect, his face covered by his hands, while his companions were crouching down as though in very fear at God's awful presence upon the lonely scene they had sought for a meeting across an open grave.

CHAPTER II.

PECKING AT THE BARS.

WHEN the maiden returned to consciousness, for she had swooned away at the, to her, awful scene, she found herself alone, for no longer was the open space occupied by those who had been there; their cruel work was done and they had gone.

With an effort of control the young girl regained her composure, though her face still wore a white, scared look, and she glanced staringly toward the spot where had lain the form of the man who had fallen before the aim of his foe.

How long she had been unconscious she knew not; but it could not have been many minutes, for the storm had not yet broken upon the earth, though

the roar of its approach sounded louder and louder, and the lightning flashed wildly around her, causing her to shrink with very dread.

The rapid tinkle of the bell showed that the cow was hurrying homeward to escape the tempest, and the girl was about to follow her example, when a white piece of paper attracted her attention.

It lay near where the dead man had fallen, and she walked timidly toward the spot and picked up the object that had caught her eye.

It was a letter in an open envelope, and unfolded therein was a photograph of a beautiful woman, young, yet sad-looking.

The envelope was addressed to:

"Colonel Roslyn Roselle."

Nothing else was written thereon, and then the girl, with a curiosity that might be excused under the circumstances, read the few lines that were written upon the scented, tinted paper.

They were as follows:

"MY OWN ROSLYN:

"I am a prisoner in my own home, for my brother returned to-day, and from some source was heard the story of our love.

"By a faithful servant I send you this note, inclosing my photograph, and beg you to at once leave the country, for Clarence has sworn to take your life, and well I know that he will keep his word.

"Go, Roslyn, for my sake, and when you are safe from harm, then I will come and seek you, and together we will go through life.

"Now I cannot say more. Wear my likeness next your heart, and it will, I pray God, protect you.

"When you have gone elsewhere, write to our old address, and I will come to you.

"Ever loving you, I bid you a hopeful farewell.

"FLORICE."

"She is a beautiful woman, but her image did not protect him she loved; yes, I see all now—she is strangely like the one who fired the death-shot; *the brother killed the lover!*"

Thus mused the maiden, as she returned the photograph and letter to the envelope, and securely hid them in her bosom, while her face flushed and eyes sparkled as she continued musing half aloud.

"Oh, that I could be once more in the beautiful world I knew as a child, but from which, for four years, I have been banished.

"I am beautiful, I know, and beauty is power, for I have this day seen one man die at the hand of another, and a woman lured him on to his ruin.

"Girl that I am, I feel that I could win hearts—ay, make men my very slaves; but my power must not be felt, for I am imprisoned here, and all I have in the world to care for me is a woman I hate, even though kindred blood flows in our veins.

"Must I remain here forever when I know my beauty and my power?"

"Or, must I escape to the beautiful world and become a belle, as all beautiful women can?"

"No, I am a slave here, and here must remain; yet I cannot but fret at my imprisonment—Ha! I hear the shrill voice of auntie calling me, and I must off to the river."

So saying the maiden cast another shuddering glance upon the red stain which the earth was slowly drinking up, and with a light step bounded away toward the river bank.

Arriving there she found the waters growing darker and darker under the gloom of the heavens, and beheld that the storm was gathering its skurrying legions of storm-clouds together for the fray, which she knew would burst with fury soon.

Yet, though she dreaded the shock of the tempest, and trembled at the thought of facing the danger on the treacherous waters, she feared the shrill voice and rude hand of her hated aunt still more, and springing into her rude boat, she seized the oars and sped off over the waters—determined to face that which few men dare face.

As she pulled out upon the waters, lying in wait, as it were, to engulf the daring girl who thus defied their power when lashed to fury by the angry winds, the shrill voice of her aunt was again heard, and the next moment she appeared upon the scene.

One glance out over the river, and she beheld the light skiff bounding away, and loudly she cried for her to come back. But, unheeding, the maiden sped swiftly on, and a troubled look came upon the woman's face, while she cried anxiously, "My God! she will surely drown—curse her recklessness—no, no, no, she must not drown, for though I hate her, yet she must not die, or my life-long plot will fail, and I will lose all, riches, revenge and all.

"Come back, girl! fool that you are, do you not see your danger? Come back, come back!"

In vain the cry; the maiden still kept on until she reached mid-river, and there, throwing out her anchor, she calmly sat down to kidnap from the dark waters the evening meal for herself and scolding aunt, while she really enjoyed the fright of the woman whom she spied upon the shore, and whose voice she plainly heard, though heeded not.

As the lightning flashed more brightly, and the storm waxed more viciously, and the thunder rolled with deeper and more threatening sound, the face of the woman grew paler, and louder and louder she shrieked to the thoughtless girl.

Louder and louder rung out her cries, until the long-coming storm at length was upon the waiting winds the waters were lashed into madness, a darkness like unto night fell upon the earth, and with terror at the violence of the tempest, the woman shrunk back under the shelter of the huge rock, crying out, "She is lost, she is lost! Yes, the waves have washed over her, and I shall never see her more."

Then, with a despairing cry, as though the hopes

of a lifetime were shattered at one fell blow, she sunk down and buried her face in her bony hands.

CHAPTER III.

THE YOUNG MASTER OF THE YACHT.

WITHIN the massive walls of the University, upon which the eyes of the maiden had been turned from her position near the rock, sat a young man, indolently gazing from the window of his comfortably furnished room, and apparently in deep and melancholy thought.

In his hand he held an open letter, and it was what he had therein read that clouded his brow and set him to musing.

Apparently twenty-five years of age, he was yet several years younger, for his life of wild dissipation had added maturity and hard lines to his face which otherwise would have been unmarred.

Still it was a handsome face, dark, fascinating, in spite of its expression, and in the eyes dwelt a look hard to fathom.

He was attired in the height of fashion, and his chamber was furnished almost luxuriantly. Around the walls hung sketches and paintings from his own pencil and brush, while a guitar upon the floor, and a flute upon the table, proved that he was a lover of music.

Other articles of pastime, a pair of fells, a shotgun, and a brace of pistols, hung upon the wall, and a decanter of brandy and glasses were upon a side-board.

But, unmindful of the interior comforts of his temporary home, all of which portrayed the student of wealth, refinement and unlimited indulgence, the young lord of this luxuriant chamber wistfully gazed without, yet seemingly unconscious of the approaching storm, looming grandly up from behind the hills upon the river's other shore.

Presently he raised the open letter in his hand, and read, written in a delicate, feminine hand:

"Oh, Claude, if you would but relinquish your wild life, then I would love you so dearly; but as it is now, this must be the last letter I must ever write to you.

"Blame not, Claude, my brother Mark, for he certainly should advise me of your wild course at college, and being constantly near you has every opportunity to know you as you are.

"If it were not for your fast life Mark would gladly see me one day become your wife; but, as it is, he forbids me to write to you again, and, though I hate sadly to give you up, I must do so—at least, until you prove yourself worthy of my love; then all will be well again, Claude, and I need not reproach you more.

"Remember, Claude, when you have proven yourself the true man I long to see you, come to me, and I will prove how dearly I love you."

The student paused, raised his eyes again to the scenery without, and said:

"Poor, darling Louise; you are worth the sacrifice, and I will prove myself worthy of your love—Ha! yonder is that fair maid again at the rock—I would give a cool hundred to speak to her—and I will."

As if instantly forgetting his new resolve, and the maiden who had temporarily won him away from his evil life, Claude Clinton, the handsome, dashing, wild and reckless heir of a large fortune, arose quickly, and, shoving the letter into his pocket, seized his cap and rapidly descended from his rooms to the campus.

Down the gravel walk to the river walked the handsome student, until he halted upon a pier, against which were moored several small sail-boats, or yachts, belonging to the students and the college.

Into one of the largest and handsomest of these Claude Clinton sprung and instantly raised the sail and cast off.

A light breeze was blowing, and the little yacht glided away, and yet, though the student knew that the threatening storm must soon break upon him, he showed no fear, but boldly began to tack across the river.

After twenty minutes' sailing, Claude Clinton beheld a light skiff shoot out from the other shore and row directly for the middle of the river.

"By Heaven! she is a brave girl to coolly throw out her line in the face of the tempest. Ha! there comes a warning; I must luff up and reef."

So saying the student brought his little craft up into the wind, lowered his sail and soon had all snugly reefed down.

As he again sprung to his tiller, the storm was upon him, and at once he knew his danger and felt also, that if he could not aid the young girl in her frail skiff she would be lost.

On sped his yacht, held firmly on her course, but running lee under, pressed over by the mad winds, while the waters were lashed into a foaming caldron, and around him all was almost as dark as night.

He had already cursed the position of the skiff, ere the storm struck it, and directly toward the spot he held his way, his eyes narrowly searching the waters.

A moment more and a white object caught his eye—*it was the upturned skiff!*

Searchingly he scanned the mad waters, but nowhere visible was the form for which he looked, and in a tone of real anguish, he cried:

"My God! she is lost! Poor, poor girl."

CHAPTER IV.

A GIRL'S RESOLVE TO CONQUER.

WHEN Claude Clinton felt certain that the maiden was lost, he put his little craft about, for it was buffeted hard by the cruel waves, and was endeavoring to reach the University pier, when, suddenly, he descried a human form in the waters.

One glance, and he recognized the maiden, an expert swimmer, struggling hard for life and nearly exhausted, yet still struggling.

He recognized her by the long golden braids of hair floating behind her, and instantly cried out in ringing tones:

"Keep where you are, miss, and I will run to windward of you."

Up to that moment the maiden had believed herself lost, yet, since her frail skiff had capsized, she had determined to struggle for life.

Glancing behind her at the call, for she had not before seen the yacht, she instantly felt revived with hope, waved her hand in reply, and the next moment was drawn on board the little craft.

Claude Clinton had often before seen the maiden upon the river, and time and again had endeavored to approach her, but always she had eluded him, while she had as often admired the handsome young student, and shunned him through dread of her aunt's displeasure, though she loved to meet him.

Now the two were face to face, and to the student the maiden owed the preservation of her life.

"Shall I take you to your home, miss?" asked Claude Clinton, gazing with rapture into the beautiful face before him.

"If you please. The wind comes from the other shore, and we can run in under the shelter of the land," replied the maiden, in the sweetest voice the student had ever heard.

Instantly he put the craft away on its course for the other shore, and a few minutes after the sharp bow grazed the rock, crouching against which was the old scold, cursing, praying and bewailing in the same breath.

The arrival of the boat startled her, and seeing the maiden safe she at once began a tirade of abuse against her, which surprised Claude Clinton, and further astonished was he when the old virago gave him also a sample of her temper.

Too thoroughly polite to retort to an old aunt—in the presence of a lovely niece—Claude Clinton bowed, sprung back upon his yacht, and was soon during the storm in recrossing the river, and leaving behind him his heart in the keeping of the lovely girl whose life he had saved.

Once having seen the maiden, and looked down into her passion-stirring eyes, Claude Clinton was determined to again meet her, even if he had to face old Madam Ramsey, as her aunt was called, and come under a running fire from her sharp tongue.

But a week elapsed ere he could accomplish his object, and then he had to run his yacht boldly up to her little boat as she was fishing in the river, and in full view of the University and the cottage in the glen.

From that day Claude Clinton and Eve Ainslie met constantly, and the image of poor Louise was taken from out the student's heart, and the beautiful face of the cottage maiden enshrined there, for the young man seemed to love her with his whole heart.

As for Eve Ainslie, though a mere child in years, she was a woman in form and mind, and her ambitious nature caused her to determine to make Claude Clinton her slave from the first.

Though thankful to him in her inmost heart for having saved her life, and admiring him exceedingly, he was yet not the man to win her whole love, to stir the deeper feelings of her nature.

Still he was a stepping-stone to other triumphs, and she would place her tiny foot upon his neck and thereby lift herself from obscurity to a position in the world.

Finding that he could not make a toy of the maiden, country girl though she was, and fascinated by her, Claude Clinton came boldly out and asked her to become his wife.

"You have told me that your father wishes you to remain at college the balance of the term?" quietly said Eve.

"True; but I have thought of a plan which, if you will agree to, will cause all to come right in the end. Listen and I will tell you," and Claude Clinton made known to Eve Ainslie a plan he had formed, which, for reckless daring, has found few students in a University's walls bold enough to risk the chances of its success.

CHAPTER V.

THE SECRET DISCOVERED.

"Well, Leslie, what do you think of the new student—Clinton's chum?"

"I think if he wore petticoats I would fall desperately in love with him, for his face is as beautiful as any woman's I ever beheld."

"Indeed it is, and his form as graceful, while he at once went to the head of all his classes. He'll strip the university of its prizes, I fear. Yonder he comes now, and he seems to be Claude Clinton's very shadow."

The speakers were two students, standing on the campus. One was Mark Leslie, the brother of Louise, who had written so kindly to Claude Clinton, urging him to reform his evil habits.

As Mark's companion spoke, Claude Clinton and the object of their conversation approached, and the latter was presented as *Everard Ainslie*.

Mark Leslie greeted him warmly, and gazed earnestly into his wondrously handsome face, and upon his slight, graceful form, and from that moment, in his mind, a seed of suspicion was sown that was destined to germinate rapidly and in the end bring forth bitter fruit for him to pluck.

The more Mark Leslie saw of Everard Ainslie, the more his suspicions were confirmed, until he was thoroughly convinced that he was right in his supposition.

Knowing Claude Clinton well, he also liked him well, though he knew him to be gay and reckless and

leading a life which no young girl could safely justify or overlook.

For this reason he had urged upon his sister Louise to banish Claude Clinton from her heart, for, living as they did in the same neighborhood, they had been friends from earliest childhood.

Knowing that Louise was believed engaged to Claude Clinton, by many of his fellow-students, and convinced that he was playing some deep game, and dragging down to ruin some innocent girl, Mark Leslie one day sought an interview with his fellow-student in his own rooms.

What passed in that interview none ever knew, but angry words were heard, followed by a pistol-shot, a cry, a heavy fall, and Claude Clinton fled from the college, a hunted man, haunted with the thought that he had taken the life of Mark Leslie, who, up to a short while before, had been his most intimate friend.

As the students and professors rushed into the chambers, they beheld a scene that filled them with horror, for Mark Leslie lay prone upon the floor, bleeding profusely from a wound in his side.

Surgical aid was instantly summoned, and the wounded student received every attention. His companions gathered outside the door and conversed in suppressed whispers, while others started in hot pursuit of the murderer, for none believed that Mark Leslie could live.

Among the group outside the door, and pallid and silent, stood the new scholar, Everard Ainslie, unmindful of any of the questions addressed to him.

At length he entered the room, for, being the chum of Claude Clinton, he was admitted, and walking up to the bed whereon lay the wounded man, he said, nervously:

"Why did Claude Clinton do this deed?"

Mark Leslie turned his splendid eyes upon the student, and said, faintly:

"Come closer to me."

Everard Ainslie placed his delicate ear near to the lips of the sufferer, who said, in a whisper:

"I know you as you are. Others will soon know, so leave the university at once."

"From my heart I thank you. You are a noble man—"

"This must not be allowed," broke in the surgeon, angrily, and stooping, Everard Ainslie pressed a kiss upon the forehead of Mark Leslie, and turned away quickly, while all present glanced at him, in surprise, at his sudden and strange mark of affection for his fellow student.

Walking to an escritoire in the next room, Everard Ainslie took therefrom a large roll of bank-bills, a bundle of papers or letters, and a silver-mounted pistol and jeweled dirk.

These he quickly secreted about his person, and throwing his cloak across his arm, he took up his hat and walked rapidly from the room, after one earnest, searching glance around him.

Ten minutes after, he had gone forth into the night alone, without one word of farewell to fellow student or professor, and forever turned his back upon the university where he had passed months of, apparently, contented student life.

CHAPTER VI.

THE HIGHWAY TO RUIN.

WHEN Claude Clinton fled from the room, after the death-blow aimed at the heart of Mark Leslie, he dashed at once to the stables of the institution, and in five minutes after was flying along the mountain highway mounted upon his own steed, for a horse was another luxury the young *millionaire* indulged in as a means of education.

For several hours he pressed his steed hard, his mind in a chaos of troubled thought, his brow knitted and teeth firmly set, while, ever and anon, he would glance nervously behind him, either in fear of pursuit, or from a fear that he would behold in chase the phantom of poor Mark Leslie.

"My God! thus rushes my life into a new wickedness, and I tread the threshold of manhood as a murderer," he hissed forth between his teeth.

Then, after awhile he continued:

"But he was too bitter toward me—he brought it upon himself. Poor, poor Mark, you have fallen by my hand, and over me rushes the remembrance of our happy boyhood—the many joyous hours we have passed together—and Louise, yes, Louise! what will she think of me now?"

"Curse me bitterly as her brother's murderer! Come, you brute; you but creep along," and the sharp spurs sunk deep into the flanks of the tired animal, while, in disjointed sentences, the unhappy man still continued to muse aloud.

"And all for her!" he cried, bitterly—"for a woman yet a girl, and who I verily believe hates me."

"Curses rest on her, and upon me for being a fool to marry her! Oh! that I were free from her—that I could fly from her memory and from the stain on my conscience."

"No, it will not wash out—blood-stains are indelible—ha! now that I am forced to fly like a hunted hound, she will seek my home, make known the damnable secret that she is my wife, and revel in my wealth—for her silvery tongue, her beautiful eyes will touch the heart of even my stern father—curse her, oh, curse her—Ha!"

Claude Clinton suddenly drew rein, for before him loomed up an ivy-grown church, surrounded by the glittering monuments of the dead.

The moon had risen and shed down upon the lonely and sacred spot a flood of silvery light, and the scene was most impressive; all was silence and desertion; for, excepting a glimmering light from the window of the distant parsonage, it seemed as if only the dead were near.

"By Heaven! how strange that I should have taken this road! Yes, it is the same old church,

with its dead sentinels around it, for, surely, the dead guard it from intrusion. *By the Heaven above me I will do it!*"

The last part of the sentence was almost shrieked, and instantly springing from his horse, Claude Clinton hitched him to the fence, and walked with determined step toward the lonely church.

To his surprise, he found the door partly open, and murmured, "They fear no intrusion here."

Entering, he soon found himself within the sacred edifice, and the moonlight streaming through the windows enabled him to see his way.

It was a sacred spot, a lonely place for a man flying from justice, after aiming a death-blow at his truest friend, and Claude Clinton was fully impressed with the scene and walked with hesitating step up the broad aisle.

In front of the chancel he paused, and glanced nervously around him, while he murmured aloud, "Here we knelt and were made man and wife, and here I curse her now!"

A moment he stood as if overwhelmed by the rush of bitter thoughts upon him, and then he sprung lightly over the low rail and crossed the chancel toward the vestry-room door.

The knob turned to his touch, and he entered the room to start back with a half cry of fright, for, at the table before the long window, sat a human form.

A closer glance reassured him; he saw that the man was asleep, for his head was bowed forward upon his desk—his hand, still holding a pen, rested upon his unfinished sermon, and regular breathing came from the ministerial lungs.

Right upon the sleeper fell the ray of moonlight, and displaying also a candlestick with empty socket, for the candle had burned out some time before.

"A dry sermon indeed, to drive its composer to sleep," thought Claude Clinton, with cruel wit, and then, not to be turned aside from the purpose he had in view, he cautiously crossed the room toward a bookcase, one door of which was open.

Noiselessly he searched for a moment, and then drew from a shelf a large and time-worn book—the records of the church.

With the moonlight streaming down upon the open page, he soon found that for which he was in search, and stealthily tore the leaf from the volume which held records of the marriages and deaths of the parish for half a century.

The tearing sound awoke the sleeper; the minister sprung to his feet, and beholding a stranger before him, as he believed robbing the church of its silver communion service, which was also kept in the bookcase, he rushed upon him and held him with firm grasp ere Claude Clinton could fly.

Hastily showing the stolen record into his bosom, the young student cried, sternly:

"Unhand me, old man?"

"Never! you vile creature, who would rob the sanctuary of your God. I will hold you and deliver you to justice," cried the thoroughly aroused, indignant, and fearless old minister.

"Unhand me, I say," almost shrieked Claude Clinton, and though a powerful man, he in vain endeavored to shake off the firm clutch that held him.

"Never!" still replied the man of God, and with a bitter oath, Claude Clinton, drew from his pocket a keen knife; the blade flashed in the moonlight, and with a crunching sound sunk deep into the bosom of the protector of God's sanctuary.

"Oh! God, have mercy and forgive him this deed!" cried the old man, staggering back, while the blood from his wound spouted over his murderer.

Wildly the long arms were thrown about, then the hands clasped, as if in prayer, a deep groan came from the pallid lips, and the wounded man fell dead across the table, whereon, a short time before, he had been writing his Sabbath sermon.

With a cry of horror at his deadly act, Claude Clinton rushed from the sacred edifice he had desecrated, and bounding into his saddle, darted away at the utmost speed of his horse. In his terror and haste to fly from the scene of death, he was unmindful that the record he had taken life to get possession of fell from his bosom, and fluttered down the road before the balmy breeze of the autumn night.

CHAPTER VII.

THE STAINED RECORD.

EVERARD AINSLIE left the university grounds, and tended his way rapidly down the moonlighted road, leading to the village, a mile distant.

Arriving there he sought out a livery-stable and hired a man to drive him to the city, thirty miles distant.

What thoughts passed through the mind of Everard Ainslie, as he drove swiftly along the country road, it were hard to tell; but certain it was that the driver found him a most taciturn companion for a midnight drive, for seldom did he speak, except to urge on the willing horses.

By a strange fatality Everard Ainslie had taken the same road over which Claude Clinton had passed but three hours ahead of him, and as a turn in the highway brought him in full view of the old ivy-grown church, he started, flushed, and paled vividly, although he little knew what a ghastly object lay within its dark portals.

"Yes, 'tis the very same. From yonder church I wandered forth in life. Where shall I end?" half aloud said the young student, and then he cried:

"Hold on, driver!"

As the vehicle drew up Everard Ainslie sprang to the ground, and stood for a moment gazing upon the quaint old church, a feeling of awe creeping over him, as he glanced nervously upon the monuments of the dead.

Suddenly to his very feet fluttered a sheet of white paper, blown along by the wind.

Stooping he took it up, and seeing writing thereon, glanced closely upon it.

Instantly a cry escaped from his lips, and pressing his left hand to his breast, he staggered back, his face a mirror of conflicting emotions.

It was a large sheet of paper, fully twenty inches in length and eight in breadth—torn from a large book; it was the same sheet, crumpled and spotted with blood, which Claude Clinton had unknowingly dropped as he mounted his horse to fly from the scene of his cruel deed.

That stained record told the story—it told that upon a certain spring day, some four months before, Claude Clinton and Eve Ainslie had been bound in the holy bonds of wedlock, before the chancel of that dead-encircled church, by one who now lay stark and stiff in the sanctuary of his heavenly Master.

For a moment Everard Ainslie seemed like one dazed by his discovery, and then he muttered in a husky voice:

"In God's name! how can this have come here—and it is stained with blood—ha! *Claude Clinton came this way.*"

"Yes, it was *his* act, to tear this from the book of records; yet, why this stain?"

"I fear, yet I know not what I fear, but thank God I hold this in my hands, for were he to possess it, I would be disowned and dishonored."

"Ha, ha, ha, Claude Clinton, I hold the winning hand!"

"You have tired of me, and would cast me off. Though flying for your life you came here to destroy this record; but I have it, and the stain upon it may one day bring you to the gallows."

"Well, I must on, and mayhap I may yet meet him, and—*if I do!*" But I'll not whisper that even to myself.

"Ha! I'll find out the secret of this red stain. Driver, await me here."

So saying, Everard Ainslie walked with determined step toward the ivy-green structure, placed his hand firmly upon the latch, but hesitated, shuddering as though a mortal fear was upon him.

Regaining his self-control, he entered the sacred edifice, and glanced timidly around the gloomy spot.

With faltering step he walked along the aisle until he stood within the chancel.

Not a sound broke the solemn silence, and it seemed like sacrilege to there intrude.

He had nerved himself, however, to the task, and was determined to proceed if the very specters of the dead arose before him.

Crossing the chancel he entered the vestry-room, and with a cry of horror started back.

There in the moonlight, his pale face upturned, his eyes open and staring a glassy stare, lay the poor rector.

Bounding forward, Everard Ainslie gave one look into the marble-like face, placed his hand upon the silent heart, and then, with a cry of mingled joy, sorrow, fright and despair, clutched at his head as if in frenzy, and rushed from the church.

Springing into the waiting vehicle he cried, in ringing tones:

"Drive on! for the love of God, drive on!"

Startled by the wild manner of the youth, the driver plied his whip and they seemed to fairly fly over the moonlit road, and when the gray dawn of day broke in the east, the lonely church and its terrible secret were miles away—then, and then only, when the rosy tint of morn fell upon his face, did Everard Ainslie drive from him the horror that had grasped at his heart.

Arriving in the city, Everard sought an obscure hotel, dismissed his driver, and the college student was launched upon Destiny's highway, to tread the thorny path of life without one protecting hand stretched forth to guide from evil.

CHAPTER VIII.

BROTHER AND SISTER.

"Dead! dead! and by the hand of my own brother."

"Oh, God! is there aught in this world for me now to live for?"

The speaker was a woman of rare loveliness in face and form, although her features were stamped with an almost despairing sorrow.

She was attired in a loose morning-wrapper, that was most becoming to her, and was pacing to and fro, with a nervous tread, from one room into the other, for the door between the two was open.

The rooms were large, elegantly furnished, and most comfortable—the one a parlor, the other a bedchamber.

A piano and a guitar, proved that the occupants were possessed of a musical taste, while numerous books scattered here and there showed literary amusements for idle hours.

In her hands, as she paced to and fro, the young girl, for she seemed scarcely more than eighteen, held a leathern wallet containing papers and bank-notes.

"This was taken from him after he fell, and brought to me—but what care I for these papers? They do not bring me back my poor slain Roslyn."

"Dead! can I realize that he is dead? that I shall never again touch his lips, his hand—that an open grave lies between us—a grave of my own brother's digging?"

"Oh! Clarence! Clarence! you deemed you were avenging your sister's honor—but you were crushing her to the earth in despair."

"Now the secret must be known—yes, I can tell it now, for he is dead; yes, I can make Clarence Erskine, brother though he is of mine, shrink with horror to know that he has killed, not my destroyer, but my husband!"

"Ay, Clarence Erskine, you have slain one who was innocent, and— Yes, they say he faced death boldly; for why should he fear to die when his heart was unsullied?"

"Ha! who can that be?" and the woman started, as a tap came upon the door.

A second time it was repeated; but she seemed to have lost all power of speech to bid the one without to enter; but stood staring at the closed portal, as though she expected to see some dread specter enter the room.

Then the door slowly opened, and with a cry of horror the woman recognized the man who entered.

It was the same tall, graceful form, the same earnest blue eyes that had faced Colonel Roslyn Roselle and sent him to his death.

It was Clarence Erskine, the brother of Florice—the avenger of a sister's honor.

Strangely alike were the two; but in the eyes of the sister there sparkled a fire almost kindled of hatred; in the eyes of the brother there was a look of intense sadness.

"Ha, ha, ha! Clarence Erskine! murderer, slayer of the guiltless, you have dared pollute this sacred spot with your presence?"

"Do you not fear that an avenging God will wither your own right hand, stained as it is with the blood of my husband?"

"Your husband!" gasped the man.

"Ay, Clarence Erskine—now I will tell you the truth; Roslyn Roselle was my husband, and you have slain him!"

"Away! away! How dare you contaminate this room with your presence?" and Florice pointed toward the door with a manner most threatening, a face clouded with the wildest passions.

"Florice, hear me—" began the brother, but the woman broke in with:

"What! do you dare to palliate the wrong you have done me?"

"I dare tell you, Florice, that your name was bandied about, torn with dishonor, and that I sought an explanation from you, and you gave me none."

"I then went to Colonel Roselle, and his answer was that he had no explanation to make."

"Believing you yet innocent of wrong, and hoping to check you ere you were drawn over the brink of crime, I challenged Roslyn Roselle, for he would make me no promise never to see you again, and knowing his past life as I did, and remembering that a mystery hung about him which none could fathom, I was determined to end the unfortunate relations between you."

"To this end, to protect my sister from a designing villain, as I believed him to be, I was willing to risk my life against his."

"We met, and the result you know—Roslyn Roselle fell by my hand."

"Now, when too late, you tell me you were his wife, and I have the curse upon my life of his blood."

"Oh, Florice! Florice! this is awful!" and the brother raised his hands to his face and shuddered as bitter memory swept over him like a tidal wave of sorrow, desolating his life.

But, Florice stood like a statue, and no word escaping her lips, after a while Clarence Erskine continued:

"You sorrow for a husband, slain by a brother's hand, Florice; your heart will ache, but time will heal the wound, while I, my sister, will, as each year rolls by, but suffer more, for blood-stains wash not out; they stain the hand, the heart, the brain—hold! listen to me while I tell you that to-day I leave my father's house."

"I have ample means, ay, a generous income, and I will live apart from you—to-day our paths in life divide, for by my presence I will not continually bring up before you a phantom of your buried love and I care not to sit constantly between you and the grim specter of death."

"But, Florice, I am still your brother, and our father is journeying toward the grave, and he is all you have to love you; yet, when he is gone, when you are left alone in the world, and you need a friend, a brother's love, come to me as in the olden time when you were my little sister."

"Cheer up, now, Florice; the grave has divided all who loved each other in the past—the grave will divide all who love each other in the future, Florice."

A moment more and he was gone; yet still Florice stood staring at the door, a grim smile upon her lips, a look of sorrow swelling up into her beautiful eyes.

CHAPTER IX.

JUST IN TIME.

ALONG a lonely country road, traversing the mountain district of New York State, rolled a traveling carriage, drawn by a pair of fine black horses, and driven by a colored coachman.

In the vehicle were two persons, an elderly gentleman, of perhaps fifty-five, with the bearing of a soldier, and a face full of nobleness and generosity, while his snow-white hair and mustache gave him an expression of almost womanly sweetness.

The person by his side was Florice Erskine; as beautiful as when the reader last beheld her, and yet a look of settled sadness upon her face which had not rested there four months before.

Clad in the deepest mourning, it was yet most becoming to her; but the sunshine of life was gone, and the horizon of her future was shadowed by clouds which were not tinged with a silver lining.

"Father, how long will it take us to reach our new home?" suddenly asked Florice, with a partly wearied look upon her lovely face.

"Perhaps two weeks, daughter, for you know we will not leave our carriage until we reach Virginia;

then Henry can come on alone, while we dash on by rail."

"And you think I shall like Wildidle, as you call the estate, father?"

"Yes, Florice; it is one of the grandest old homes in the South, and as you know, belonged to an old army comrade of mine; but he ran through with his fortune after the death of his wife; the place was advertised for sale, and, remembering what it was, when I visited him twelve years ago, I purchased it, thinking it would be a delightful retreat for you, and where I could also forget the turmoil of the busy world."

"Therefore I had it put in thorough repair, re-furnished and improved, and I know that we will both love Wildidle."

"And Clarence? he will remain in the city, I suppose?"

It was the first time that Clarence Erskine had ever heard the name of her brother upon his daughter's lips since the fatal duel in which Clarence had slain Roslyn Roselle, and the father looked quickly toward her, and then said, after a moment's hesitation:

"Yes, Clarence will remain in the city, and practice his profession, in which he is certainly making a name—though why he should worry himself with the troubles of other people I know not, as his fortune, independent of what he has from me, is most generous."

"His conscience needs quieting—he must work, or—*go mad.*" almost savagely said Florice; but, ere her father could reply, the vehicle came to a sudden halt; the horses swayed violently to one side; the crack of a pistol followed, and then came a half-shriek of pain, a heavy fall, and two heavily-bearded faces peered into the carriage windows.

The sudden halt, the shot, the cry, together with the dark faces that bent upon her, caused Florice to faint away, just as her father leaned forward to draw his pistol from one of the carriage pockets, where he kept it in traveling.

But, the muzzle of a revolver was in his face, and a stern voice cried:

"Hold, old gentleman, for you have too many around you to play that game. Give us your gold, not lead, and be quick about it too, for we are not men to brook delay," said the man at the other window.

Feeling that the odds were against him, Colonel Erskine determined to yield, and said quietly:

"I have but little gold with me, but that I shall surrender at your demand."

"About how much, boss?" impudently asked the first speaker.

"Perhaps several hundred dollars—"

"It won't do—come, boys, we'll take the girl, and when he wants to give a few thousand for her recovery, he can get her—"

"Hold! you would not take my daughter?" cried the fond father, horrified at the very thought.

"That's just what we would do, if she was your wife. We need money, boss."

As if to carry out his threat the speaker laid his hand heavily upon the unconscious Florice, when, suddenly, there came a cry of alarm from a third man, who was holding the horses.

Instantly both men at the carriage windows started back the one to fall to the ground insensible from a blow upon the head from a heavy cane, the other to dart into the forest, quickly followed by his companion, who stood at the head of the horses.

Released of their restraint, the animals would have dashed away, and Colonel Erskine and his daughter might have been dragged to a horrible death; but a lithe form sprung to their bits and checked them, while the colonel sprang from the carriage to the aid of him who had proved himself the preserver of himself and Florice, and boldly came to their rescue at the risk of his own life.

CHAPTER X.

NO LONGER A WAIF.

WHEN Colonel Erskine beheld the one who had so daringly aided him, he was struck with surprise, for, instead of some bold farmer, as he supposed him to be, he saw a youth of apparently eighteen, with a slender, graceful form, and a face of almost feminine beauty, though upon it rested a look of determination and daring hardly reconcilable with the features of a girl.

Besides a suit of dark cloth, with loose pants, and a blouse coat, he wore a pair of top boots and a slouch hat that shaded his face, and half hid the clustering, short curls around his neck.

At his feet lay a small bundle, and in his hand he carried a short cane, the same with which he had felled the highwayman to the ground.

"Your coachman is not dead, as I believed, sir," said the youth, pleasantly, as he pointed to the negro driver, who was seated on the other side of the vehicle, lugubriously rubbing his head, upon which was a slight flesh-wound, cut by the bullet of the robbers, and as they believed killing him.

Fortunately it had only stunned him.

"Thank God! Toby, you are all right," said his master, going and aiding the negro to arise.

"I ain't so sure o' dat, massa; I dun got a hole in my head, and de bullet rattle about in dar like a pea in a gourd."

"Nonsense, Toby; it only cut the skin; look after the horses while I see to poor Florice," and Colonel Erskine returned to the carriage, while Toby remarked:

"Young massa, am I a dead nigger, or am I not, dat's de question?"

"You are all right, Toby; that wound will be all right in a few days, thanks to the thickness of your skull. Here, take hold of the horses while I see which was the hardest, my stick or yonder fellow's

head," and the youth pointed to the highwayman, who lay still where he had fallen.

When Colonel Erskine reached the carriage he found Florice recovered from her swoon, and quietly glancing out of the open door.

"Thank God, Florice, we have passed through a terrible ordeal almost unscathed, for poor Toby is more frightened than hurt; and all thanks are due to yonder gallant youth."

"What an almost beautiful face he has," and Florice gazed intently upon the youth, as he approached and bent over the highwayman.

Pressing his hand upon the heart of the man, the young man started back with a half cry of terror, while his face blanched white.

"He is dead, sir," he said, slowly, and with a strange earnestness of manner, turning to Colonel Erskine.

"Yes, he is dead; but his death saved my daughter from a terrible fate, I fear, for I was powerless to aid her, and to you we owe all," and Colonel Erskine held forth his hand to the young man, who grasped it warmly, while he replied:

"Death is terrible in any form, sir, and especially so when caused by one's own hand; but if I have served you and your daughter I shall not bemoan my act," and he seemed as if choking back deep feeling that swelled up into his throat.

"Well, we must continue on our way, and you, sir, must accept a seat in our carriage with us."

"What will you do with this body?" and the youth pointed, with a shudder, to the dead man.

"I will let Toby place it on the rack, and deliver it up to the authorities of the next village we enter. Come, sir, you go our way, do you not?"

"I was wending my way to the city, sir."

Colonel Erskine glanced earnestly at the humble attire, and then into the frank, fine face, and said:

"You have friends there, I suppose, and are going there to seek work?"

"I have no friends in the world, sir; but I am going to seek work."

Inexpressibly sad was the tone in which the reply was given, and it touched the hearts of the kind colonel and his daughter, the latter instantly remarking:

"Then come with us, and we will be your friends, and my father will give you employment."

"Assuredly; come with us, for I owe you a debt of gratitude I can never repay. You have no ties to bind you elsewhere, by your own admission, so come and live with us."

Two bright tears glistened in the handsome eyes, and his nether lip trembled, as though his heart was brimful of joy and thankfulness, and then he said, quietly:

"I speak the truth when I tell you I have no friends."

"I am a mere waif, and tiring of my home left it to seek employment. Had my parents lived—had that home been a happy one, never would I have left it as I did."

"With too little money to ride, I was going on foot to New York to see what the future had in store for me."

"Thank God, my many long miles of weary travel, have resulted in doing a good service."

The frank manner of the youth, and his honest face carried conviction that he spoke the truth, and Colonel Erskine placed his hand upon his shoulder, and said, earnestly:

"You shall not want for friends in the future, my boy, for I am rich and most willing to aid you. What is your name, please tell me."

"Everard Ainslie, sir."

"A good name. Now come; let us be off."

A few moments more and the body of the highwayman was placed securely upon the rack with the baggage, and, mounting his box, Toby drove on, Everard Ainslie occupying a seat within the vehicle, and subdued and thoughtful with the sudden change in his fortunes, for, unused to the ways of the town, he had been fleeced out of nearly all his money upon his journey, and, anxious to reach New York, had started forward on foot, for there was the Mecca of his hopes—there he believed lay the corner-stone of a brilliant future, whatever that future might be.

CHAPTER XI.

DOWN BREAKS!

UPON account of the shock to Florice of the highwayman's attack upon them, Colonel Erskine determined to give up the idea of continuing on by carriage and go by rail instead, especially as they had already been detained for two days in a miserable country inn by the stupidity of a resident justice, who believed it his duty to hold the whole party for murder.

Bidding Toby to drive on by long stages, Colonel Erskine, Florice and Everard Ainslie took the train at a country depot, and were soon ensconced in a comfortable car, whirling away at the rate of thirty miles an hour.

More and more impressed in favor of the handsome youth, Colonel Erskine and Florice were glad of their meeting with him, and as he possessed a good education and wrote a small but beautiful hand, he was tendered the position of private secretary to his benefactor, whose extensive business, in looking after his estates, would certainly require an aid.

Retiring in manner, polite and most attentive to every want of Florice, Everard Ainslie soon won her heart, and seemed by his pleasant conversation, to gradually draw her away from her sad memories.

Along flew the train, winding like a huge serpent, through lovely valleys and around the base of lofty hills, until at last the light of day faded away, and night cast its sable mantle over all.

Yet still on rushed the thundering train, the huge eye of the locomotive alert for danger ahead, and the brave engineer on the watch to protect the hundreds of lives intrusted to his care.

Suddenly around the dark base of a hill sped the train.

Unsuspecting of danger were all when the quick eye of the engineer discovered, not a hundred yards ahead, a misplaced rail.

Loudly shrieked the whistle to "down breaks," and creaking, rattling, clanging, the attentive breaksmen wound them up to their furthest link, for still went forth the cry of warning.

Instantly there was a wild excitement among the passengers; a few cries of terror at the sudden jerking of the cars, and then the whistle ceased, a loud roar of steam burst forth; a jar, a terrific shock, a crashing of timbers, a grating of iron, shrieks of despair, groans of agony, and all was a chaos of destruction.

All those who could do so, arose to their feet, and struggled from the ruin and death around them, and once free themselves they turned with dread to those who had been less fortunate.

To add to the horror, there arose shrieks of pain from children, groans of agony wrung from strong men, and low moans of anguish from patient, suffering women.

From the wreck of the car in which were Colonel Erskine, Florice and Everard Ainslie, one form struggled up, and stood an instant gazing around him, as if dazed or stunned by the shock.

It was Everard Ainslie.

"Thank God! I am unhurt; but my poor friends, what of them?" he murmured, glancing around, timidly, as if fearing to discover a sight he dare not face.

"Everard, here we are."

It was the voice of Colonel Erskine, and his tone was as if it came through shut teeth to keep back a groan of pain.

At once the youth sprang forward, and, by the light of a lantern, taken from the hands of the dead conductor, he beheld a sight that turned his very heart cold.

There lay Colonel Erskine, his right leg pinned beneath a cushioned seat, his left arm lying broken and helpless by his side.

His right arm encircled the waist of poor Florice, whose pale, upturned face looked like death.

"She has swooned, I hope—she is dead, I fear," said the poor father, in a whisper.

Two men were standing near, seemingly bereft of all presence of mind, as is usual with many on occasions where nerve is needed.

To these Everard called, and, as if awakening to a sense of their duty, they sprang to his aid, and in a few moments the slender, graceful form of Florice was removed from the wreck, and laid upon a mossy bank near by. Then Colonel Erskine was relieved from his painful position, and laid beside his daughter, while Everard bounded away to seek aid.

But he had not far to go, ere he met a host of willing hands and kind hearts, coming from the village on the hill, for it was early in the night, and many had watched the fiery serpent gliding along the valley, until they beheld it suddenly dash itself to pieces against the rocky base of the hill.

By his exertions in behalf of his friends, Everard soon had them placed in a carriage, and removed to comfortable quarters in the town, a mile distant, where a kind physician at once attended to them.

"Attend to her first—see, is she dead?" said Colonel Erskine, as the man of medicine approached him.

Turning to where Florice lay, pallid and silent, the physician laid his hand over the heart, and started.

It had ceased to beat.

Florice, the beautiful, sorrowing girl, for she was nothing more, was dead—hurled from life into eternity, in an instant of time.

CHAPTER XI.

THE HOUNDS ON THE QUARRY.

THE day after the fatal accident, Everard Ainslie sat in a room of the hotel by the bedside of Colonel Erskine, who lay unconscious from delirium and pain. The blow of Florice's death had hit him hard, for his love for his daughter verged upon idolatry.

In an adjoining room, the door open between, lay the beautiful form of Florice, cold in death, and from his seat by the bedside of the sufferer, young Ainslie ever and anon glanced timidly upon the face of the dead.

Suddenly the door softly opened, and a tall form stood upon the threshold, with white, scared face.

It was Clarence Erskine!

One glance into that face, and Everard Ainslie blanched, and his form trembled violently.

Once before he had seen that face and form, and under circumstances which he could never forget.

Walking lightly across the room, Clarence Erskine came to the bedside, and with a glance only at Everard, said softly, as he laid his hand upon his father's head:

"How is he hurt?"

"His arm is broken in two places, and it is feared he is injured internally; but he seems better now."

"And Florice, my sister—she is—"

"Dead! she lies yonder. She was crushed to death between the seats."

The strong man covered his face with his hands, and shuddered violently.

Then he said, quietly:

"I thank you—you are Everard Ainslie, of whom my father wrote. I have much to thank you for."

Without another word, Clarence Erskine walked into the adjoining room, closing the door behind him.

Thus two hours passed away, and then he returned, his face white, cold and stern.

As he re-entered the room Colonel Erskine opened his eyes, a gleam of reason shining in them.

Beholding his son he held forth his hand, and a groan of agony came from his inmost heart.

"Father, poor Florice is dead; but I yet have you. Are you suffering much?"

"Here is my suffering, Clarence—here; otherwise I feel better," and the brave man placed his hand upon his heart, from whence had been cruelly dragged by death his dearest idol.

Seating himself by the bed, Clarence told his father that he had come as soon as he had received Everard's dispatch, and that while he conveyed poor Florice to her grave, in the family burying-ground, he did not fear to leave him for a few days in the hands of his faithful nurse.

With almost despair clutching at his heart, Colonel Erskine saw his son depart, bearing with him the body of poor Florice; but in Everard Ainslie he had one who was as devoted to him as a daughter could be, and his sufferings were soothed, his sorrows sympathized with, with the soft touch and kindness of heart of a woman.

At length, after several weeks of suffering, Colonel Erskine was sufficiently recovered to admit of his being removed to his old home in the city where he had always lived.

Since the bitter parting between his son and daughter the father had devoted himself almost wholly to Florice, leaving Clarence alone in their city mansion to keep bachelor's hall.

Worried by the thought that he had slain a man whose attentions, after all, were not dishonorable toward his sister, and embittered because Florice, whom he loved with all a brother's love, had come to hate and abhor him, Clarence devoted himself to the practice of his profession, in which he was rapidly rising to distinction, for he was possessed of a splendid mind, was a fine orator, and a deep student.

As Florice no longer lived, Colonel Erskine was anxious to return home as soon as possible. He felt deeply for his son, whose quarrel with Colonel Roselle he had certainly upheld, for, like Clarence, he believed the designs of the man to be evil.

Accompanied by Everard Ainslie, Colonel Erskine arrived at his city house one pleasant morning. He was met by Clarence, who, after affectionately greeting his father, welcomed the youth most warmly, for there was something in the strangely fascinating face of the young secretary that drew him irresistibly toward him.

As for Everard, he seemed to rather shun Clarence, and was wont to gaze upon him with a strange, absent look, as if to recall something from the long-buried past.

Thus a few weeks more passed away, and Colonel Erskine was thoroughly restored to bodily health, though he yet grieved deeply for poor Florice.

Each day had Everard made himself more useful, to both father and son, until they began to look upon him as a necessity in the household; and, determined to yet go to his new home in the South, Wildidle, Colonel Erskine intended taking the youth with him.

At length the day for departure rolled round, and was a scene of bustle in the mansion, when suddenly two men ascended the broad stone steps, and, approaching Everard, one of them said, quietly:

"Your name is Everard Ainslie, I believe?"

"That is my name, sir," said the youth, turning slightly pale.

"Then I arrest you, in the name of the law, Everard Ainslie, upon the charge of murder," and in an instant the well-molded wrists of the surprised and frightened youth were encircled by iron handcuffs.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE FELON'S CELL.

"Hold, sir! there is some mistake, and what mean you by this insolence?" cried Colonel Erskine, stepping angrily forward in front of the two officers of the law, while Clarence advanced, and said:

"I hope you understand your duty, and are not overstepping it."

"Mr. Erskine, you know me, sir, and know I am not a man to act foolishly."

"This gentleman with me is a detective, and has been on the track of the youngster here for two months, and at length we have run him to his lair," and the man spoke as though thoroughly convinced of Everard's guilt.

"And the charge you make against him is that of murder?"

"Yes, sir; he committed a murder two months ago, that would be worthy of the most hardened criminal."

"I hope he can prove himself innocent, sir, not only for his own sake, but for yours, for you seem to have taken a great interest in him, but my duty is plain—he must go with me to jail."

"Good God! Everard, speak! what have you to say for yourself?" cried Colonel Erskine, earnestly, of the youth, who, pallid as death, trembling violently, and with downcast eyes, stood in silence, and seeming despair.

As if about to speak his answer to Colonel Erskine, his lips moved; but Clarence cried, quickly:

"Hold, Everard! do not open your lips, and to those who address you make no reply, else you commit yourself."

"Go with these men you must; but be brave, be strong, and all will come right in the end, for I am convinced that there is some terrible mistake here—that you are as innocent as am I, of this charge against you."

"I thank you, sir, from my heart, I thank you," murmured Everard, and turning to the officer in

charge, he said, firmly, while he looked him full in the face:

"I am ready to accompany you to prison, sir."

The shrinking, trembling manner had gone, and like a fearless man he faced his accusers.

"I will accompany you, Everard, and see that you are allowed every comfort I can procure for you. Father, will you also go?"

"Yes, my son; it will show that the poor boy is not friendless, and, mind you, officers, you'll rue this arrest if you cannot prove your bold assertion of his being guilty of murder."

At once giving up all idea of his proposed trip South, Colonel Erskine ordered his baggage returned to his room, and a few moments after the party entered the carriage in waiting, and were driven to the city prison, where Everard Ainslie was immediately placed in as comfortable quarters as his two true friends could procure for him.

Once securely in his cell, the youth turned to the detective who had tracked him, as he said, to his doom, and quietly asked:

"Who is it that I am accused of murdering?"

"A nice question for you to ask, my pretty fellow," roughly returned the man.

"A most natural question, I think, as I am the one most interested. Tell me, who was it I murdered?"

"A poor old inoffensive preacher; a man who never harmed any one in the world; a man whose very gray hairs should have protected him, even if the sanctuary of God did not, for you killed him in his own church."

Everard Ainslie turned even more pallid, staggered back against the cold, white-washed wall of his cell, and covering his face with his hands, shook like an aspen leaf, while deep sobs burst through his shut teeth.

In dismay, in fear, both Colonel Erskine and Clarence gazed upon him, and in their gaze was a look of deepest compassion.

The detective, the officer who had arrested him, and the jailer smiled grimly.

They believed that the emotion of the youth was a confession, almost, of his guilt.

At length Everard Ainslie recovered himself, choked back the sobs, and with a cold, stern face, asked:

"Who makes this charge against me?"

"The one who drove you on your deadly errand—"

"It is false, and did I so desire, I can so prove it, even now. Colonel, and you, Mr. Erskine, do not lose your trust in me. When my trial comes, I will prove myself innocent."

"I believe you my son," kindly said Colonel Erskine, while Clarence returned:

"Everard, cheer up, and I will yet bring you out of this prison with flying colors, for, though certain circumstantial evidence may be strong against you, I feel sure that you are innocent of this charge."

Ten minutes more and Everard Ainslie was alone in a felon's cell.

CHAPTER XIV. THE COURT ORDEAL.

The day of the trial came at last, and the interest created in the murder of the old minister, and the youth and striking appearance of the supposed murderer, was intense, and crowded the court-house with a large number of persons desirous of beholding the prisoner, and hearing the testimony for and against.

At length Everard Ainslie was brought into the court-room, pale, calm, and apparently unmoved by the penalty hanging over him if found guilty of the terrible charge against him.

As he felt the eyes of hundreds turned upon him, his face flushed crimson for a moment, and then back again rushed the blood, leaving him as pallid as the dead.

Taking the seat assigned to him, he turned his eyes upon the judge, as if endeavoring to discover if any show of mercy rested there.

Then, as each jurymen was accepted, and took his seat in the box, Everard glanced wistfully into his face, as if studying his character.

Like a hawk, Clarence Erskine sat watching the proceedings of the court, challenging here and there a jurymen, and with his cold, biting sarcasm causing the opposing counsel to wince at each parting of his stern lips.

Near the prisoner was Colonel Erskine, an anxious, sorrowful expression on his fine face, and yet an appearance of having full confidence in two things—the innocence of the prisoner, and the power of Clarence to wholly prove it.

At length the jury-box was full, and the trial began.

The first witness called was Anthony White.

A smile crossed the lips of Everard Ainslie as the man, who had driven him from the college to the town, took the witness stand.

"Mr. White, you have made the charge of murder against this prisoner: will you tell the court why you did so?" said the lawyer for the prosecution, who glanced over to a part of the room where sat two ladies in deep mourning and a youth by their side.

"I drove the young gentleman, some three months ago, from the college where he was a student, to the city, some thirty miles distant."

"He hired you for that purpose?"

"Yes, sir; he gave me twenty dollars for the trip—"

"Never mind what he gave you. It was at night, was it not?"

"Yes, sir; but the moon was a-shining as bright as day."

"Go on to relate the incidents of that midnight ride."

"Well, sir, the young gentleman seemed to be very cross about something, for when I went to talk to him—you see I am sociable like in my habits—he snapped me up short."

"Well, at length we came to the Silver Creek church, and the prisoner stared at it, as though he was frightened, and suddenly called out to me to stop."

"I drew up the horses, and he sprung out, and whether he had dropped something or not, I do not know; but he stooped and picked up a white paper, one end of which had a dark stain upon it."

"After a few moments of hesitation, at one time attempting to get into the vehicle, he approached the gate, entered, and soon after I saw him go into the church."

"How long was he in church, witness?" asked the lawyer.

"I do not know for certain, sir. The horses was pretty restless, and he might have been twenty minutes or half an hour."

"When he came out he was running, and his hands was up to his head."

"Jumping into the buggy, he told me to 'Drive on, for God's sake!' and I was scared at his manner, and drove on pretty rapid, and until we reached town he never spoke to me."

"You drove him to a hotel in the city, did you not?"

"Yes, sir; I put my horses up for a feed and rest, and started back early in the forenoon."

"When I reached the church, there was a crowd of country people there, and I was told the rector had been killed the night before."

"As I drove on home, it came over me how strange the young fellow had acted, and when I got back I spoke of it to my boss, and he sent for his lawyer, and that is the way it all came out."

"You are certain, then, Mr. White, that the prisoner was the murderer of the Rev. Felix Hargrove, the rector of Silver Creek church?" asked the lawyer.

"Yes, sir, it appears so to me. If he didn't do it, who did?"

"You are not on the stand, Mr. White, to ask conundrums," said the deep, cutting voice of Clarence Erskine; and then, as the witness was turned over to his tender mercies, the young lawyer continued:

"You are, I believe, Mr. White, noted as a kind of circulating news-monger, in the quiet village that is honored as the place of your nativity?"

Mr. White was silent, for he felt that he was a village gossip, and Clarence continued:

"Anxious to visit the birthplace of Anthony White, I ran up to your quiet little village in the mountains, and I there learned that if any one but dropped a seed of suspicion in your neighborhood, you tended it carefully until you made it burst forth into the accusations of the bitterest kind."

"Now, I ask you, in the presence of this court, why you have frequently told it in the public inns, that the prisoner's hands were covered with blood, and that he continually muttered, before he reached the church, something like, 'I'll do it! I'll do it!'"

"I don't know what it was he said," doggedly replied the witness.

"And why did you say that, after leaving the church, he muttered, 'I've done it! I've done it!'"

"He did say something like that."

"And yet you told a dozen men, whom I have here to confront you, that those were his very words."

Under the biting sarcasm of Clarence Erskine, Anthony White left the witness stand, no longer puffed up with the idea of his greatness, and as witness after witness fell into the merciless clutches of the brilliant young advocate, their testimony was proven of little value against Everard Ainslie.

At length the time came for Clarence Erskine to make his great speech, in pleading for the innocence of his client, and the court-house was crowded almost to suffocation by a dense throng of the best people of the city.

Arising, amid a breathless silence, Clarence Erskine went on to relate how through the kindness of a wealthy fellow-student, the prisoner had been taken as a mere waif, and placed at college.

How he had behaved himself there without reproach, and never been absent from the grounds of the university from his arrival until he left.

At length a quarrel with a fellow-student caused his gay benefactor to fly from the college, for in anger he had struck at the life of a comrade, who, after weeks of lingering suffering, had recovered from the wound inflicted.

Left alone by the flight of his friend, Everard Ainslie had at once departed from the university, determined to seek a living for himself.

He admits his moody feelings the night of his drive with Mr. Anthony White, and his stopping in front of the church; nay, more—that he picked up a paper in the road, which, by some strange chance, interested him—why, the prisoner refused to make known.

Also he admitted entering the church, impelled by a motive known only to himself, and discovering there the dead body of the aged pastor.

Then it was that he fled from the sacred edifice in horror, and begged the driver to speed on for God's sake.

Arriving in the city, he sought to find his fellow-student, and for several days tracked him from place to place, and when his ebbing funds warned him away to seek work, he started for New York on foot.

While en route to the metropolis he did a noble deed, at risk of his own life; and Clarence went on to tell how Everard Ainslie had nobly served his father and sister.

Then followed an account of the accident, in which poor Florice lost her life, and then how devotedly the youth had watched over his wounded benefactor.

"Now, gentlemen of the jury," continued Clarence, "I admit that a dark, damnable mystery hangs over the murder of poor Rev. Felix Hargrove; I admit that a paper found by the roadside nearly interested my client, and that he entered the church; but you have to know whether he entered that sacred tabernacle of God for the purpose of deliberately breaking one of His commandments."

"Look! he is a mere youth; his hands are as delicate as a woman's, and yet they would say that his hand held a knife, which his arm drove through the bone, muscle and flesh, for the blade of the assassin passed entirely through the body of the murdered man."

"Bring proof that yonder boy had cause to slay the unfortunate minister, that he had plotted to meet him in his lonely vestry-room, and then you can hold Everard Ainslie for murder."

"Yonder sit the wife, the daughter and the son of Rev. Felix Hargrove, and upon their faces rests no feeling toward this prisoner, for they feel that he is guiltless of the crime charged at his door."

"Circumstances unexpected to him, the mysterious papers he found, may have made him acquainted with the truth who did the deed; but, as to his being the guilty one, out upon the thought."

For three hours did Clarence Erskine's voice ring through the crowded court, and when he at length sat down it was evident that he had made a deep impression upon all.

But the murderer was not found, if Everard Ainslie did not commit the deed, and there seemed a strong desire among many to hang somebody for the crime.

CHAPTER XV.

A SECRET NO LONGER.

WHEN Clarence Erskine ceased speaking, there was a momentary sensation in court, and the sympathy was with the prisoner; but when the counsel for the prosecution had stated fully his side of the question, and propounded time and again the unanswerable conundrum of: "If the prisoner is not the base assassin, who then is?" there seemed to be an even balance as to his guilt or innocence.

At length the charge of the judge was given, calmly and impartially, and the jury, who held in their hands the life or death of the prisoner, arose slowly from their seats to retire.

Passing out of the room, through the narrow aisle, each jurymen was compelled to hesitate an instant directly in front of the prisoner.

Searchingly, wistfully, scorchingly the lustrous, fascinating eyes of Everard Ainslie fell upon each one of those twelve faces, and as the eyes of each jurymen met that gaze they seemed to feel its magnetism—they seemed to read there innocence of the crime charged against him, and to a man they halted, hesitated, turned and went back to their seats, to the surprise and amazement of every one in that crowded room.

Then the foreman, when called upon for an explanation, arose, glanced down the line of jurymen, and answered:

"Not guilty!"

Like a statue sat Everard Ainslie, deaf to the wild applause that burst forth from the crowded court, and unmindful of the looks bent upon him.

Silently he received his dismissal from the hands of the law; totteringly he arose to receive the congratulations of Colonel Erskine and Clarence, and with a cry, as if from a broken heart, fell forward into the arms of his brilliant advocate in an almost deadly swoon.

Tenderly raising the lithe, graceful form in his powerful arms, Clarence Erskine bore him from the court-room to his carriage in waiting, and beckoning to his family physician, who was present, Colonel Erskine rapidly followed.

Springing into the carriage after the doctor, Colonel Erskine said quickly:

"Home!"

Away dashed the carriage over the paved streets, and yet, as block after block was left behind, Everard Ainslie still lay in unconsciousness.

At length the elegant mansion was reached, and up the broad stairway Clarence bore the slender form, and deposited it upon a lounge in the library, and stepped aside for the physician to approach.

Alarmed at the long fainting-fit, the man of medicine called quickly for restoratives, and tore open the loose coat and vest.

Then in surprise he bounded to his feet, crying aloud:

"My God! it is a woman!"

The surprise of Colonel Erskine and Clarence cannot be depicted, and in utter amazement they spoke not a word, but blankly stared, while the physician applied restoratives and chafed the small hands of the supposed youth.

At length the beautiful eyes partly opened, the lips quivered, a sigh was heard, and consciousness had returned.

"Ah! I am no longer in that horrible court—yes, I am free—oh! sir, what do I not owe to you?" and rising quickly, the one who had so long been believed a youth, threw herself upon her knees before Clarence Erskine.

Then, as if realizing her position, and feeling that her secret was known, her face flushed scarlet, and the beautiful eyes drooped and sought the floor, while the pleader's form trembled violently.

After a moment she said:

"Ere you condemn me, my noble friends, hear me, for, to you, I have a long and full confession to make."

"I have deceived you, true; but I will tell you all, and throw myself upon your mercy, and then, if you

bid me go, I will never again darken your doorway with my presence."

"My child, my poor little waif, arise, and do not feel that either Clarence or myself will set you adrift again in the world."

"When you are willing to tell us all, we will hear you; now you need rest, and we will leave you," and Colonel Erskine extended his hand and raised the maiden to her feet, and, followed by his son and the physician, left the room, after adding that the secret of her sex should remain inviolate, until she chose to make it known.

CHAPTER XVI. SANS OEUR.

WHEN the colonel and Clarence left the room, followed a moment after by the doctor, the maiden seemed an invalid, recovering from a long siege of sickness, for her face had been blanched snow-white during her imprisonment, and a certain haggard look hung round the eyes, while her mouth seemed strangely stern for one so young in life's trials.

But when left alone the maiden sprang to her feet, and her face became flushed with excitement, as she nervously paced the room.

As the minutes passed away she grew more calm, and the hard, haggard look passed from her face, while there settled thereon an expression of daring determination, and her hands closed tight together, as though she had made up her mind to her future course.

Pacing quickly to and fro for a moment, she said, half aloud:

"Well, I must make a bold stand now, or all is lost—all my bright hopes for power over men will be dashed to the ground."

"I know that I am beautiful in face and faultless in form, and I feel that I can coin a sweet revenge against mankind, for has not one man whom I trusted cast a shadow over the very threshold of my life?"

"Did he not swear to me that I should be acknowledged his wife before the world, and live with him in his grand city home? but, how did he keep that promise? Why he tired of me, just as I have read in novels that other men tired of as fair women as I. Yes, he would have cast me off, for he was plotting so to do when the crash came sooner than he had anticipated."

"No, I did not love him; he could not stir the inmost recesses of my heart—heart, did I say?"

"Why, I have no such function—I am *without heart*—now; yet there was a time when my best love would have gone forth to one man, and did he but nurture it as it deserved it would have been all that he could have wished."

"It is said, and with truth—

"Woman's love, like the ivy,
Will too often cling,
Around a base and worthless thing."

"And thus it was with *my love*. He was unworthy of it, and cast off the tendrils of my affection."

"Well, the die is cast now, and I am launched upon the tempestuous sea of life; but is it my fault that I am what I am, an unrecognized wife?"

"No; Fate led me astray, and Fate was cruel, for it cast my life in unpleasant places; it made my home a very hell; my days and nights a very nightmare of dread; but I cannot believe that I was destined to ever pass my days in that spot, which it were desecration upon the name of *home* to call it such."

"Now, without heart I must ever be, for for what must I care now? Am I not a cast off wife? Is not my husband a fugitive, with the brand of murder upon his soul? Is not my own hand, delicate and shapely though it be, stained with blood? True, it was in defense of those who have certainly proven my friends; yet the specter of the dead must arise before me, for I, a woman, a mere girl, sent him to his grave."

"And was I not tried for murder? Have not my days and nights, for weeks past, been passed in a felon's cell? Am I not a waif, an outcast?"

"Oh, God! how the damnable questions surge up to be answered against my soul!"

"But I have stepped off the brink now, and I must go down; I must not draw back now, for I have drank of the fatal chalice held to my lips, and its poison is running like molten lead through my veins."

"True, I might tell them the whole truth, and they would not cast me off; but, dare I run the risk? Might not the trail of his crime be followed and his life end upon the gallows? *He must not die thus*, for I must meet him yet; I have a wrong to avenge. I hold against him that which will make his very craven soul cringe with despair."

"No, I must not hesitate now; I must have no heart, no conscience, but, with a mask of falsehood upon my face, go defiantly through life."

"Yes, I will brave it out."

So saying, the maiden, by an exertion of her wonderful self-control, drove from her face every shadow of evil, every hard look, and with a smile upon her full lips, a glance of affection in her beautiful eyes, left the room to seek Colonel Erskine and Clarence, for she purposed making to them a confession—a *tissue of falsehoods*.

CHAPTER XVII. THE CONFESSION.

IN the luxuriously furnished rooms of Colonel Erskine sat that gentleman and his son Clarence, conversing in earnest tones upon the remarkable discovery they had made in regard to their *protege*, who had so unexpectedly turned out to be a woman.

Suddenly the door opened, and the object of their conversation entered. Advancing quickly, with nervous tread and downcast eyes, while her face was

flushed as though with natural bloom, the maiden said, quietly:

"Have I intruded, my friends, for such you have proven yourselves to be?"

"By no means, Eve—Ev—what must I call you now?"

"Eve, sir. My name is Eve Ainslie. The latter part of my Christian name was added."

"And aptly done! Be seated, Eve, for we were just speaking of you, and of how cleverly you had deceived every one who knew you. Be seated, please, and tell us how you feel now," and Colonel Erskine drew the maiden gently toward him.

"I am better, thank you, sir; in fact I am quite recovered, and have come to make to you and your son a confession which I owe you—"

"Wait a while, Eve, for your nerves are yet unstrung from the long and cruel strain upon them. You need rest and quiet," said Clarence, kindly.

"No, let me tell you all now, and then I will feel more like rest, and I desire earnestly to confess to you, and prove that, though I deceived you as regards myself, I certainly had no desire to do so otherwise," and Eve Ainslie spoke most earnestly, while both Colonel Erskine and Clarence awaited in silent expectation the confession she had to make.

"From first to last I must tell you all," began the maiden, seating herself in an easy-chair, and in such a way that the shadows from the window curtain fell upon her face.

"Yes," she continued, "it is not my intention to deceive any longer, especially you my true friends, whom I have learned to love so dearly."

"I was born upon the Hudson river, and my father was a gentleman and a man of wealth—my mother was a poor farmer's daughter."

"Disinherited by his parents for marrying one beneath him, my father took to the sea for a support, and upon the sea he lost his life when I was a wee thing."

"My mother soon after went to her grave—it was said dying of a broken heart, and as I was a pretty, bright child, my father's rich and proud relatives adopted me, and for years I lived with them indulged in every luxury, and educated daily in all that it was proper for me to know."

"Though a mere girl I was a proficient musician, possessed a good voice, and was a fair artist; but when in my fifteenth year there came a crash; my grandfather lost his wealth in speculation, shot himself through the heart in despair, and his family were left penniless. Even my own rich wardrobe and jewels went for food, and I was consigned to the care of a harsh, cruel woman, living on the river in a small house of her own."

"The woman had once been the *affiance* of my father; then she was beautiful and well off; but, when my father married another, she became tired of a gay life, gave up the world, and settled herself down to a lonely life of bitter regret."

"I at first believed that she took me with her from kindness of heart—a lingering love for my father's memory; now I know that she did so for *revenge*."

"From the day I entered her home I became her slave. Every duty was thrown upon me. I even caught the fish for dinner, attended to the garden, milked the cow, and did all the work about the place that a man should have done."

"But, what else could I do? I was in her power and without a friend in the world to aid me."

"From my hard duties I soon got to wearing clothes fitted to my work, and some old clothing was made into suits for me, until I was wont to dress wholly in man's attire."

"And well was it for me that I was so dressed, for often I was upset on the river, and had I worn the clothing my sex demanded I should have been drowned."

"One day, when out fishing, a squall came up and upset a small sail-boat lying not far from me, its occupant having gone to sleep."

"Washed away from his capsized boat, and in the middle of the river, the person would have been drowned, had I not gone to his rescue, and drawn him into my skiff."

"He proved to be a student of a college a few miles distant, and was so thankful for his life that he offered me a large sum of money, believing me to be, in my rough clothing, and with my hair cut short, some fisher lad."

"At first I was almost tempted to take his gold, and with it to fly from my cruel bondage; but I thought afterward that I could not be happy if I accepted his money, and so I refused, greatly to his chagrin."

"After that we met several times, and believing me still a boy he begged me to enter the college as a student, telling me that he was rich and would defray all my expenses."

"After a long deliberation I accepted his offer, for I was anxious to gain as good an education as possible; but he promised that he would keep a strict account of all he spent for me, and one day allow me to refund it to him."

"With this understanding, he ordered a small room, adjoining his own, prepared for me, and one night sailed over after me, bringing a trunk of clothing for me."

"Leaving my house by stealth, I entered the walls of the university, and became a student there, none suspecting my sex."

"My noble benefactor at length was drawn into a quarrel, as before I told you, with a fellow student, and fled from the college, and then I felt that I must leave also."

"My flight from the university on that fatal night; my arrival in the city, and start, on foot, to New York, you know, so I will say no more."

"And no more need be said, my child," said the

kind old colonel, as Eve Ainslie concluded her confession, and let her head fall upon her hand.

Then, while his voice trembled with emotion, he continued:

"You have been like a son to me, child, and now you must take a warmer place in my heart; you must fill the vacuum left by the death of my poor Florice; yes, you shall be as my own daughter, and from this hour cast off the disguise you have so long worn."

"Come, Eve, you are my daughter now, and Clarence will be your brother."

A glad light shot through the eyes of Eve Ainslie, and springing forward she hid her face upon the broad breast of Colonel Erskine, her heart wildly throbbing with joy at her glorious triumph, the future looming up grandly before her ambitious eyes.

CHAPTER XVIII. WILDIDLE.

UPON the sea-washed shore of a southern State was Wildidle, the new home of Colonel Erskine.

A more beautiful home heart could not desire, for the villa was a handsome, commodious structure, with deep bay-windows and broad piazzas, and from its front and east wing a broad view of the ocean could be obtained, with jutting points and wooded isles up and down the coast.

Around the mansion, to the south and west, were a lovely lawn and flower-garden, while to the northward ranged an extensive park of lordly trees, through which bounded a number of graceful deer, led by a fleet-footed monarch of the forest, with large spreading antlers and nimble feet.

Back of the mansion, at some distance, were the stable and out-houses, built upon a similar plan to the house, and a quarter of a mile away, forming a crescent around the white beach of a small bay, were a score of neat-looking cottages, the "quarters" of the servants of Wildidle.

A fountain here and there, a piece of marble statuary, white shell walks, flower-bespangled beds, and rolling lawns of velvet grass, with the constantly changing ocean scenery, rendered the surroundings of Wildidle beautiful indeed, while Gothic and rustic summer-houses invited loungers into their cool and quiet retreats.

Running out into the water, some fifty feet, was a neat pier, with a small arbor upon the end, and here there were arranged comfortable seats, for those who cared to watch the restless waters coming in from the sea beyond.

Around the pier, gently rising and falling upon the waters, were a small pleasure-yacht and several gayly painted row-boats, with velvet cushions and striped awnings, which rendered them most comfortable.

Entering the grand and massive looking mansion, on every side was luxury, and everywhere an air of comfort prevailed, from the broad hallway to the spacious parlors, inviting library, and cool and extensive dining-room.

Up-stairs were the sleeping chambers, large, convenient, luxuriously furnished, and sufficient in number to accommodate a score of guests, for the former master of Wildidle was a genial and hospitable host—far too much so for his own good.

In the library, lolling back in his easy-chair, and gazing listlessly, and yet admiringly, out over the quiet waters of the little bay, and out upon the restless waves of the sea beyond, was the new lord and master of Wildidle, Colonel Erskine.

In the large bow-window, an open book upon her lap, sat a maiden.

So completely metamorphosed was Everard Ainslie, from a handsome, graceful youth of twenty, apparently, into a lovely, brilliant maiden of eighteen, that none would have recognized her.

Dressed in a morning-robe of white lawn, that fitted her elegant form to perfection, and with her massive braids of hair fastened with a silver cor in one coil at the back of her haughty head, Eve Ainslie was indeed a wondrously lovely woman—on that few men could gaze upon unmoved by her charms.

Upon her quiet features there was no ruffle of discontent—no footprints of an embittered life—no sign that her life was a lie—her face was an impenetrable mask.

She had cast the die—she had made a false confession, and her words had been believed by those who had loved her.

By the falsehood she had gained a lovely home, a kind father, a loving brother—and wealth.

But would she not have gained all these had she been sincere in her confession—had she told the whole truth and nothing but the truth?

Such would the "still, small voice" of her conscience sometimes ask her, and she had to admit, knowing as she did both Colonel Erskine and his noble son, that their kindness toward her would have been the same, even though she was a deserted wife.

But then it was not politic for Eve to have it known that she was otherwise than she had said she was, for she was playing for a higher game than she had so far won—a game, to gain which, she would have to break the laws of God and man; but, what cared a woman *without heart* for these?

For several weeks had Colonel Erskine and Eve been in their new home, enjoying to their hearts' content the balmy air of the South, the perfume of the innumerable flowers, the sweet trilling of feathered songsters, gliding over the rippling waters, and indulging in literary and musical feasts in the library and music-room.

So calmly, so softly, did the days glide away in this Eden-like home; so loving, so kind, was Eve; that Colonel Erskine almost ceased to mourn for poor Florice, for his newly-adopted daughter proved

to him all that he could wish, and he thanked God for the day when she crossed his path, for to her he owed it that his days, gliding toward the grave, were not passed in gloom and despair.

CHAPTER XIX.

LA BELLE COQUETTE.

As the days glided by at Wildidle the neighboring families called upon the new-comers, and Colonel Erskine and Eve soon found themselves courted as general favorites.

This was just what Eve most desired, for she was anxious to prove still further the power she felt that she possessed over men; but, with Colonel Erskine it was different, for he had been happy in the dreamy life he had led for a few weeks after his arrival at Wildidle.

Still he was a most hospitable host, and was fond of company, and therefore greeted all visitors in his genial, kindly manner.

As the beaux of the surrounding country began to flock around her, Eve Ainslie launched forth upon the fathomless sea of coquetry, and day after day threw her chains of love's bondage around some new admirer, holding him as she had held all others, her very slave.

With her triumph her joy and her ambition arose—joy that she could lay her hand upon the mane of any one of society's lions and cause him to kneel at her feet, and ambition to still further reascend the grade of victory, that when Clarence Erskine came to Wildidle, upon his promised visit, he would find her a queen over all, and one who held full sway over men and women alike.

Quickly through the land flew the news of her beauty, her wit, her scathing sarcasm, and everywhere were her splendid horsemanship, her superb voice, her skill as a musician, and other accomplishments discussed, while the name of *La Belle Coquette* was bestowed upon her by a gay bachelor planter, who had never been dazzled by the beauties of Europe, but had come home to be flirted with by an American girl.

But one of Eve's strong points in coquetry was never to make an enemy of a discarded lover, for, did she refuse his love, she made him feel that she really needed his friendship, and in this way she held her power over them still, and kept them fluttering around the flame of her beauty and wit like poor candle-flies, anxious, seemingly, to receive injury from so brilliant a destroyer.

The young bachelor, above referred to, lived alone on a superb estate, left him by his parents' death, ere he was of age.

Passing a number of years in Europe, Paul Launcelot had at last returned home, at the age of thirty, to rest after his wanderings, and a few months after his arrival Eve Ainslie had risen above the horizon of his life, and drawn him at once to her side, though many a fair maiden of the neighborhood had given up all idea of ever netting his obdurate heart, for he escaped all love-traps set for him.

When at last his heart was smitten, Paul Launcelot went by the board, for he became Eve Ainslie's very shadow.

At length the telling of the same old story came, and the bachelor planter was refused.

Yet so kindly, so affectionately, almost, did Eve refuse the proffer of the three treasures devoutly sought after by many of her sex—his heart, his hand, and his fortune—that she attached him to her as her *best friend*, so she told him he should be, and with that honor Paul Launcelot was compelled to be content, and almost seemed so, while, in a quiet way, he enjoyed seeing other men singe their wings and flutter back wounded and mournful.

One bright morning, when the inmates of Wildidle arose, they saw a trim-looking vessel-of-war anchored out in the little bay, it having sought shelter there during the darkness of the preceding night.

On that vessel Eve Ainslie soon found two more admirers—the one Captain Burt Lambert, a dashing, handsome young sailor of twenty-six, and the commander of the rakish-looking revenue cutter *Eaglet*—the other Howard Moulton, first lieutenant of the *Eaglet*, and a step-brother of his captain, for the widower father of Howard had married the widowed mother of Burt, when the latter was a mere boy of six, and the former ten years his senior.

As soon as breakfast was over, the morning after the arrival of the *Eaglet* in the bay, Colonel Erskine had summoned his six negro oarsmen, and gone on board the cutter, where he was warmly welcomed by Captain Lambert, who informed him that he had been ordered to that part of the coast, to watch for certain illegal traffickers upon those waters.

From that day both Burt Lambert and Howard Moulton became constant visitors at Wildidle, and before one week passed the brothers were desperately in love with Eve Ainslie, who almost seemed momentarily dazzled by the splendid appearance and glittering uniform of the handsome young sea-captain, for her kindness toward him made many a brave heart ache.

CHAPTER XX.

FACE TO FACE.

ONE pleasant afternoon, some weeks after the arrival of the *Eaglet* in the little bay, Captain Burt Lambert was rowed to the pier at Wildidle, and landing, sent his card in to Miss Erskine, for, at the urgent desire of her adopted father, Eve had dropped her own name of Ainslie.

Soon the maiden appeared, looking queenly beautiful in her dark-blue riding-habit and hat and plume, for she had made an engagement with the young captain for a gallop over the country.

Soon the horses were brought round, two of the finest in the Wildidle stables, and mounting, away dashed the handsome couple, anxiously eyed from the library window by Colonel Erskine, for, though he admired the young commander exceedingly, he dreaded lest Eve should learn to love him, a result he prayed against most sincerely, for he had hoped that Clarence would love the maiden when he saw her metamorphosed from the youth whose life he had so ably defended from the merciless clutches of the offended law.

Down a lovely road, heavily wooded upon one side by the dense forest, and containing a view of the bay and ocean upon the other, rode the officer and his fair companion, his face slightly clouded, her face bright, tinged with the excitement of her ride, and as serenely beautiful as though no storm-clouds of sorrow and trouble had swept over it.

Out upon the bosom of the bay, her delicate spars and rigging traced against the blue sky beyond, lay the *Eaglet* at anchor, fully a league away.

Pointing toward his beautiful vessel, Captain Lambert said, with some enthusiasm:

"Miss Erskine, for years past I have known but one lady-love—my vessel."

"When a mere boy, a midshipman on a vessel-of-war cruising in foreign seas, I never felt homesick, for I looked upon my ship as my home; and when I at length rose in rank, and was detached from the navy and ordered to the command of a revenue cutter, my little *Eaglet* became my home and my love—my heart's dearest idol."

"It is strange that yourself and brother should both be on the same vessel," said Eve, quietly, as if desiring to draw the captain away from a tender subject.

"Yes; but I am glad it is so, for I love Howard dearly."

"You know that we are step-brothers, and that he is ten years my senior?"

"Yes, and I like Lieutenant Moulton exceedingly."

"I am glad to hear you say so, Miss Erskine, for poor Howard has had a rather unhappy life."

"Indeed! will you tell it me?"

"There is little to tell, excepting that he entered the navy at an early age, and was rising rapidly in his profession, when a quarrel with his superior officer ended in a duel, in which he fell by Howard's hands."

"There were palliating circumstances in the case in Howard's behalf; but he was dismissed the service; and, I am sorry to say, became reckless and dissipated, and in a few years ran through his fortune, and was almost penniless in the world."

"At length, through the influence of our family, he was appointed to the command of the *Eaglet*, in the revenue service, for he had reformed completely when he had no more means at his disposal."

"Unfortunately I was ordered to the *Eaglet* shortly after, and ranking Howard, of course took command—he showing no ill-feeling toward me whatever, and to-day we are the best of friends, as well as brothers, and no better officer than Howard Moulton treads a ship's deck."

"Your loves and hatreds are doubtless very strong, Captain Lambert—at least such is my estimate of you," said Eve, and as though a match had been unwittingly thrown into powder Burt Lambert burst forth:

"Ay, my loves and hates are strong, and with my whole soul, my whole being, I love you, Eve—hold! hear me through, and then let me know my fate."

"Awhile since I told you that, in the past, my ship had been my home, my lady-love."

"Now I tell you that I would see my loved vessel and all it contains wrecked upon yonder jagged and wild reef rather than lose your love, ay, even your friendship."

"It is getting late; suppose we return, captain?" and Eve brought her spirited horse to the right-about, her companion following her example, while a shadow of disappointment swept over his face.

As they turned, a horseman suddenly confronted them, having been riding but a short distance behind, and unseen by both Burt and Eve.

One glance into that dark, strangely handsome face, and upon that elegant, graceful form, and Eve's face turned deadly pale, while she reeled, as though about to fall from her saddle.

The horseman's face also changed color, and well it might, for Eve Ainslie and Claude Clinton had again crossed each other's path—yes, those two, so strangely met, so strangely parted; husband and wife had again come face to face!

CHAPTER XXI.

CLINTON CLARENDON.

WITH a tremendous effort of self-control, Eve regained her composure, and gave Claude Clinton a cool stare, as though she had never before met him, while upon his part, he seemed as though about to speak; but, guided by her manner, touched his hat politely, and passed by, on one side.

So taken up with his own feelings, and recognizing in Claude Clinton one whom he had met before, Captain Lambert did not observe the pallor that swept over the faces of the man and the woman, nor did he notice the swaying motion of Eve, as though she were about to fall from her saddle.

In a moment Claude Clinton had continued on, while Eve said, quietly:

"Are you acquainted with the gentleman to whom you just bowed, Captain Lambert?"

"Incidentally only," almost impatiently returned the young officer, who felt that his *te-te-te* with Eve had been interrupted at a most inopportune moment for his love-making.

Eve was about to inquire still further into the acquaintance, when Captain Lambert continued, for he felt that he had spoken abruptly, perhaps:

"A few days since Mr. Clarendon, for such is the name of the gentleman, was passing by the anchorage of the *Eaglet*, in a small yacht, and a squall coming up he split his mainsail, and I hailed him to come aboard and repair the damages."

"He accepted the invitation, and while my sail-maker mended the rent, I invited the gentleman into the cabin, and over a glass of wine found him a most agreeable companion."

"Is he a resident of this neighborhood?"

"Yes; or that is, he told me he lived on a plantation several leagues down the coast—one he had lately purchased, I judged from his conversation; but you seem singularly interested in a stranger," and a pang of jealousy flashed into the heart of the young officer.

"He reminds me of one I have known well in the past. You say his name is Clarendon?"

"Yes, Clinton Clarendon—such was the name on the card he gave me—hal here he comes back, and at a gallop."

As Captain Lambert spoke there was heard the sound of quickly clattering hoofs, and a moment after up dashed the same horseman they had just met.

Drawing rein, and politely raising his hat, he said, addressing Captain Lambert:

"Pardon me, sir; but a small row-boat with the name *Eve* painted on its stern, drifted ashore upon my beach last night; can I ask if it is not the property of the lady with you?"

"Allow me, Miss Erskine, to present Mr. Clarendon, and then you can answer for yourself," said Captain Lambert.

The man bent low in his saddle with uncovered head at the introduction; the woman bowed, and smiled her sweetest smile, while she answered in her softest tones:

"It is my little boat, sir; it broke loose the other night while towing astern of the yacht, and as the wind was fresh, and the night dark, we failed to observe its loss until our arrival home, for my father and myself had been dining on board the *Eaglet*. It was kind of you, sir, to take the trouble to—"

"Not at all, Miss Erskine; to-morrow I will send you the waif—"

"Will you not let it bring you to Wildidle? My father, Colonel Erskine, will be glad to meet you, Mr. Clarendon."

The man looked searchingly into the fair face, and a doubt of identity swept across his mind, for it was as serene and pleasant as though no unpleasant remembrances were summoned up from the buried past at the sight of his face.

"Thank you, Miss Erskine; I will bring back *Eve* to the Eden from whence it strayed."

"Captain Lambert, I will be glad to entertain you, sir, any time you feel pleased to visit Cliffside. Good-evening."

Raising his hat, and again casting a searching glance into the face of Eve, Claude turned his steed quickly and rode away, while the others also continued their ride toward Wildidle—Burt Lambert anathematizing in his heart the incident that had so inopportune broken into his avowal of love.

When Clinton Clarendon, as he evidently now called himself, rode away, he kept on at a rapid pace until a bend of the road hid him from view, then he drew rein and rode meditatively along, his thoughts a chaos of conflicting emotions.

"No, I thought I could not be mistaken in that face," he mused.

"No, it is Eve, my wife; it was a lucky thought of mine—the boat; it convinced me in my suspicion. Pshaw! did not her emotion at sight of me show that she was the Eve I had known before?"

"But, why is she here? and how is it I hear her addressing Colonel Erskine as her father?"

"Report says he is worth millions—that he has an only daughter and an only son—and my Eve is that daughter."

"I must solve this mystery—I will solve it, for she will tell me all, for did she not ask me to call?"

"Strange that she should, in one glance, regain her influence over me, for I believe I would be her slave, did she so bid me."

"And, by Heaven! how beautiful she has grown! She is a perfect queen, and I do not wonder now that the men of the neighborhood have gone mad with love for Eve Erskine."

"And she knew me, and—still loves me; but, she does not suspect!"

"Yes, I must tell her a long story of how Mark Leslie dogged me day and night, until, driven to desperation, I struck him down, and that act caused me to fly from the gallows."

"Oh, God! how the memory of that fatal night rushes over me; but I must smother remorse, for I have not the cowardly heart to let despair crush me down."

"Yes, I will tell Eve, in part, the truth—how I became a wanderer in Western lands, and saving the life of a wealthy miner, was made his heir when he died, a few weeks after."

"To hide myself from all who knew me, and still fearing detection for that fatal deed in God's sanctuary, I will tell her that I took the name of my benefactor, and my father having disinherited me, I sought this land, because I heard that she was here, and longed to be near her."

"Yes, I can make up a good story, in which there is a grain of truth, and then set to work to win Eve back to me, for I must not lose her. No, no, no, she is mine now, but before the world I must make her Mrs. Clinton Clarendon. If she refuse, then I must use my power and force her to my wish, for Eve Er-

skine is too valuable a prize to let slip through my fingers."

Urging his horse forward, as though having fully made up his mind to his course, Clinton Clarendon, as I must now call him, dashed on at a rapid pace, and in an hour's time drew rein in front of a small, but handsome, plantation home, situated upon the coast, and with a rolling lawn sloping down to the beach.

Throwing his bridle-rein to a negro servant, the supposed bachelor owner of Cliffside entered his cosy mansion, and sat down to the inviting supper that awaited his coming.

But the food was untasted, and the master seemed ill at ease, for the home he had purchased, where he could hide away from those who had known him before seemed to have betrayed a skeleton in its closet.

CHAPTER XXII. AT HOME.

THE day following the horseback ride, a sail-boat put into the Wildidle pier, having in tow the little boat Eve.

To the surprise, and I may say disappointment of Eve, Clinton Clarendon was not the occupant of the little craft, but, instead, a negro stepped ashore and approached the mansion, bearing in his hand a note.

A few moments more and Eve held the missive in her hands. It simply read:

"Mr. Clarendon's compliments to Miss Erskine, and begs to return to her the little water waif."

"At another time Mr. Clarendon hopes to have the pleasure of accepting Miss Erskine's kind invitation to call."

"Say to your master, please, that whenever agreeable to him we will be glad to welcome him at Wildidle, and thank him, for me, for returning my boat. Now go to the kitchen and get your dinner before you return," and while the negro turned away, bowing politely, Eve again took up the note.

"Yes, it is his writing. How I would like to question this man regarding him; but I dare not."

"Ha! I will invite him to the mask-ball, next week, and then, from his own lips, I will learn all."

Crossing the room to a small writing-desk, Eve sat down and wrote, on delicately tinted paper:

"Colonel Erskine and his daughter will be pleased to have Mr. Clarendon's company next Thursday evening to attend a mask ball, given in honor of Miss Erskine's birthday anniversary."

"Will Mr. Clarendon, under existing circumstances, pardon the late hour at which the invitation is given, and accept Miss Erskine's warmest thanks for the return of her lost boat?"

Calling a servant she told him to give the note to the one who had brought the *Eve*, and putting on her new hat, she went forth to join Colonel Erskine, who was fishing off the end of the pier.

"Well, Eve, you have come down to keep an old man company?" said the colonel, pleasantly.

"Yes, sir, I have come to enjoy a while in your pleasant company. You see that Mr. Clarendon has returned the *Eve*?"

"Yes, it was kind of him; but I am sorry he did not come himself, as you expected he would."

"He wrote that he hoped soon to visit Wildidle, and I returned by the bearer of the note an invitation to the ball."

"Right, my daughter; and he must come prepared to spend the night with us, for he lives some twenty miles away. I will tell his man to express my wishes to him in that particular."

Ere more was said the servant approached, and Colonel Erskine gave him a message for his master, but learned that it was the intention of Mr. Clarendon to sail down to the city next week, and Eve felt that her meeting with the man she so desired to see must yet be postponed.

As the negro sailed away, heading down the coast, and happy in a liberal fee bestowed upon him by the generous owner of Wildidle, Erskine turned to Eve, and said, slyly:

"Mr. Clarendon will be another string to your bow, Eve."

"Perhaps so, sir; he is certainly a very handsome man."

"And so is Captain Lambert."

"True, sir, and he is also a very good man, and I like him exceedingly," promptly answered Eve.

"I do not doubt it; rumor says that you love him."

"Indeed, father! why I did not know that I was more kind to Captain Lambert than to a half-dozen others."

"Still, a dozen persons, ladies and gentlemen, have asked me if you were not engaged to the captain."

"Why, father!"

"True, Eve, and it is the general belief in the neighborhood—"

"There is not a word of truth in it, sir; I certainly should not have a secret from you."

"I like Captain Lambert and a number of others, but I love none of them," and Eve spoke earnestly.

"I am glad to hear it, Eve, for I do not wish you taken from me—at least yet awhile."

"There is no fear of that, my dearest father. The man I expect to marry is certainly not here."

"Now let me ask you how you like my masquerade costume?"

"Exceedingly—the dress of a Persian girl will be most becoming to you."

"Under the sad circumstances of the year past, I would rather not have had Wildidle a scene of dancing and merriment yet awhile; but then, the many kindnesses shown us by our neighbors, made me feel that we must give an entertainment in return."

"It was for my sake you did it, sir, and deeply do

I feel your kindness to me; but come, the waters are as smooth as glass so let us have a row in my little boat."

"We might as well, for a poor fish has been hanging to my hook for ten minutes, and I in blissful ignorance of the favor done me."

So saying, Colonel Erskine and Eve entered the row-boat, and seizing the oars, the maiden sent the little shell flying over the quiet waters.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE MASQUERADE.

BRIGHTLY poured the moonlight down upon the grand old mansion at Wildidle, and from every window and door came a stream of gaslight, to rival the silvery radiance of the "queen of night."

Rapidly there rolled up to the door carriage after carriage, bearing loads of ladies and gentlemen from the neighborhood for miles around, and all dressed in some fantastic costume, and wearing upon their faces impenetrable masks.

In the spacious hallways, the commodious parlors, and the grand old library, congregated the masqueraders, who soon, to the strains of sweet music, were tripping "the light fantastic," or otherwise enjoying themselves.

A few elderly gentlemen and their wives were all that had come unmasked, and at the doorway stood Colonel Erskine, his handsome, genial face unhidden beneath silken folds, for he was to receive his guests.

At length the last carriage rolled up and deposited its human freight before the marble portal, the last horseman had arrived, and Colonel Erskine turned away to join a whist party in one of the smaller sitting-rooms, leaving the masqueraders to their own enjoyment.

Presently a dark form ascended the broad steps, cloaked and masked; but from whence he had come none of the loungers around the doors and windows knew, for he had not been noticed until his foot was upon the step.

Meeting him at the doorway, the servant in charge ushered him into the gentlemen's dining-room, and a few moments after he appeared in the rooms below—a tall, elegant form, clad in the uniform of an officer in the United States army.

None appeared to know him, and quietly he stalked about the rooms, attracting general attention and admiration, but totally disguised beneath his black silk mask, which fitted his face closely.

At length he seemed to attach himself to a maiden in a Persian costume—the handsomest dress and form in the room; but, unable to solve the mystery of who he was, the fair Persian soon left his arm for a waltz with Captain Lambert, for though he wore a mask, all present told the officer that his uniform and form betrayed him.

Hardly had the waltz ended when the strange masquerader stepped up to the naval officer and said:

"There is an arbor in the orange grove to the right of the mansion—will you meet me there in half an hour? It is most important."

Though seemingly surprised at the request, the sailor replied:

"I will be there."

As if satisfied, the army officer went leisurely to the dressing-room, and resuming his cloak and hat, left the mansion and wended his way through the labyrinth of flower-bordered walks, until he came to a small orange grove, in the center of which was a rustic arbor.

Entering the summer-house, he threw himself upon a seat, and patiently waited for the person who had promised to meet him there.

Slowly the moments passed away, and then, quickly approaching, he spied the naval officer, the moonlight glistening on the lace and buttons of his uniform.

A moment more and he also entered the arbor, saying, somewhat haughtily:

"You desired me to meet you here, sir."

"Yes—the settlement of differences between gentlemen had better be done in a quiet way, you know."

"I confess I do not understand you, sir; your voice I fail to recall as before having heard, and I know of no difference between any man in this country and myself—at least, any of a serious nature."

"Mine with you, then, is of a deadly nature—I seek your life!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE DUEL EN MASQUE.

STEPPING back quickly at the words of the strange man before him, the sailor laid his hand upon the hilt of his sword, while he replied, calmly:

"Is this a part of the Wildidle masquerade—or do you really mean what you say?"

"No dying man was ever more in earnest; I seek your life," replied the other, sternly.

"And why, may I ask?"

"You love Eve Erskine, and rumor says that you intend to marry her."

"Indeed! Rumor is most kind; but, what if it were true?"

"Then I forbid it, and if you are not a coward you will draw your sword and cross mine in defense of your honor and your love."

As the stranger spoke he drew his sword and stepped out into the broad moonlight, whence he was quickly followed by his foe, also with drawn weapon.

"I allow no man to call me a coward, sir, and hence I am willing to gratify your whim. Defend yourself!"

As the sailor spoke he sprung forward, and the two weapons came together with a ringing clang.

Instantly the combat became fierce and deadly, for both men seemed masters in the art of fence; but the stranger seemed the more powerful of the two, and handled his sword with savage earnestness, until at length he struck up the blade of his foeman and drove his own gleaming weapon through and through the body of his adversary, who, clasp- ing his hands to his head, tottered forward, and fell to the ground.

Thoroughly cleaning his sword, by wiping it upon the clothing of his fallen foe the stranger wheeled and walked away, disappearing in the shadow of the park, just as a party of masqueraders came leisurely along, strolling toward the arbor.

A few moments more the two persons in front, a lady in a Persian costume, and a gentleman dressed as a Mexican *lancero*, started back in alarm, for at their feet lay the form of the dying man.

"Good God! he is dying—see, he is fearfully wounded," and the Mexican masquerader knelt beside the wounded man, just as the rest of the party, half a dozen in number, crowded up in alarm.

"Captain Lambert slain?" said the lady in the Persian dress, her tone one of horror.

"It is not Captain Lambert—but Paul Launcelot; see! We exchanged costumes," and springing to his feet the speaker tore aside his mask, and the face of Burt Lambert was revealed.

Instantly all was excitement; and, tearing her mask from her face, the Persian maiden revealed the beautiful features of Eve Erskine, while she cried, earnestly:

"Quick! gentlemen, for God's sake! See if his life cannot yet be saved."

"Bring him into the mansion, while I hasten to tell my father and Doctor Mayhew, who are playing whist together."

While Eve bounded away, followed by the other ladies, who composed the party, the several gentlemen, directed by Captain Lambert, tenderly raised the form of poor Paul Launcelot, and bore it toward the mansion.

Into a quiet chamber the wounded man was borne, and Dr. Mayhew at once examined his wound, and with a foreboding look turned away.

"Doctor, am I dying?"

All started, for they had believed Paul Launcelot unconscious.

"You are badly wounded, Paul—"

"Do not evade me, doctor; am I not dying?"

"Yes—I dread to say that it is so," sorrowfully responded the kind-hearted man of medicine.

Seeing that his patient was rapidly sinking, Doctor Mayhew turned to Colonel Erskine, who stood near, and said:

"He has but a short time to live; would it not be well to at once learn from him who it was that gave him his death-blow?"

"You are right, doctor, for there seems a deep mystery over this sad affair that should be at once cleared up," and then approaching the bed, Colonel Erskine continued:

"My young friend, we all feel deeply for you, I assure you, and the one who has thus cut off your life, in the midst of joy, shall suffer the full penalty of his crime; tell us then why it is we find you thus wounded?"

"I can tell nothing; we met fairly in the duello, and I fell," with great effort replied Paul Launcelot.

"But who was your enemy?—who struck you down?"

"That—I—can—never—tell. I— Oh, God!"

They were the last words that Paul Launcelot ever spoke, for the blood burst in a torrent from his mouth, and with a groan he fell back, a dead man.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE MYSTERY DEEPENS.

IN dismay and sorrow the masquerade at Wildidle ended, on that lovely moonlit night, for in the darkness of death one of the gayest of the gay had gone forth to traverse the dark valley, slain by the hand of a deadly enemy.

With white, scared faces, the fair maidens sought their carriages, escorted by men scarcely less pale and agitated—the scene one long to be remembered by those who witnessed it, for their gorgeous costumes were in strange contrast to their hushed manner and bloodless features, so lately wreathed with smiles, and ringing with joyous *repartee* and laughter.

At last all but a few gentlemen, whom Colonel Erskine had invited to remain and endeavor to solve the mystery of Paul Launcelot's death, had gone, and the grand old mansion seemed as quiet as the tomb.

In one of the upper chambers lay the dead planter, awaiting the arrival of his faithful family servants, who had been sent for, and nervously pacing the room, still robed in her gorgeous costume, was Eve Erskine, while Captain Lambert stood at an open window, his eyes alternately wandering from the cold form to the maiden, and then upon the moonlit scene without.

Approaching Eve, Captain Lambert remarked sadly:

"Miss Erskine, do you know I believe, as a mystery hangs over the death of Mr. Launcelot, that I was the intended victim?"

"You! Captain Lambert? What reason have you to so think?" asked Eve, in surprise.

"You remember that I changed costumes with Launcelot, and as we are the same in form, none present doubted but that the gentleman in my uniform was myself, and during the early part of the evening he told me, with a light laugh, if I had a

lady-love he was assured he could impose himself upon her for me.

"I saw him with but one person—one officer in the uniform of the army, and that man no one has since seen, and as the duel was fought with swords, it must have been that he was the one who killed poor Launcelot."

"But what cause could he have had?"

"Of that I am ignorant; but I feel that Launcelot was mistaken for me—and, strange as it may seem, I have always had a presentiment that I would die in some such mysterious manner as has our poor friend."

Ere Eve could reply, the servants of the dead planter arrived, and their wailings for their poor young master touched every heart with most poignant sorrow.

From the mansion of Wildidle, poor Paul Launcelot was conveyed to his own elegant bachelor home, from whence, after two days, he was taken to his grave, beside the tomb he had erected above his dearly loved parents.

A vast concourse of people followed the body to the grave, for not only was Paul Launcelot loved by all who knew him, but the mysterious cause of his death awakened an universal sympathy for his untimely fate, and a savage vindictiveness toward the man who had taken his life.

As to who had been the author of this cruel deed, none could imagine, and all efforts to find out had proved unavailing.

At length, as none knew who had been the officer in an army uniform, suspicion settled upon him, and then around flew various rumors regarding the mysterious man.

Some asserted that he had driven to Wildidle in an unknown carriage that had awaited him in the park.

Others said that a saddle-horse had been seen hitched in the forest near by, and more yet stated that a large sail-boat had put in to the pier, remained a short while, and then departed.

At length all the neighborhood seemed of one mind—the man in the army uniform was the slayer of Paul Launcelot.

Then came under discussion the motive for the meeting, and here investigation was compelled to halt, until at length an old story was trumped up, about the fast life Paul had led while abroad, and it was remembered that he had once had an *amour* with a lady, whose husband becoming jealous, had called him to answer for a crime of which the young planter had always declared his innocence.

Still he was compelled to meet the enraged husband, and, after sparing his life once, had, at a second meeting, run him through the sword arm.

Thus rumor went on to connect that duel, of years before, with the one the night of the Wildidle masquerade, and with no other solution of the affair, they were compelled to accept that theory, at least until letters arrived from France to prove an *alibi* for the gentleman charged with the deed, for the attorney in charge of Paul Launcelot's estates had at once written out all concerning the Count de Vaile, the name of the jealous husband whom the young planter had once wounded in a *duello*.

CHAPTER XXVI.

FACE TO FACE.

A MONTH rolled by after the night of the masquerade, and still the sad affair was a topic of general conversation, excepting at Wildidle, for Eve had seemed to feel so deeply the death of Paul Launcelot, that her friends seldom mentioned his name in her presence.

One evening, as she was seated alone in the arbor on the pier, reading and thinking alternately, she saw a large sail-boat rapidly approaching the shore.

It contained two persons—one pacing the deck, the other seated at the helm.

The boat was jib and main-sail-rigged, and with all sail set was coming along at a lively pace, and in watching its progress Eve forgot her book.

It could not be Captain Lambert, for of late he had been cruising almost constantly after smugglers, and had only sailed the day before in the *Eagle*, in chase of a suspicious sail that appeared in the offing, and then, as if discovering the cutter, had stood rapidly seaward.

"Besides," she murmured, "that is not his boat; it is too large and—Ha! it is *he*! At last he has come!"

Another closer glance upon the approaching boat and Eve Erskine saw that she was right—a negro sat at the helm—Clinton Clarendon was pacing the deck, his hands clasped behind his back, his eyes cast down, as though in deep meditation.

A few moments more and the sable helmsman skillfully rounded to and brought his boat alongside the pier, upon which Clinton Clarendon skillfully sprang, while he called out:

"Stand off and on, Buck, until I hail you."

"Yis, massa, I'll be on hand," replied the helmsman, as his boat glided by without checking its progress, while he at the same time doffed his tarpaulin to Eve, for he had not forgotten the liberal fee she had bestowed upon him when he brought her little row-boat home.

Turning to Eve, Clinton Clarendon raised his hat, and said, politely:

"At last I have done myself the pleasure of accepting your kind invitation to call, Miss Erskine."

Eve gazed fixedly upon him, and though bitterness welled up into her breast, and a cruel light came into her eyes, she felt that she had never seen a more handsome man, and one, had he been different than he was, more capable of winning a woman's love—and holding it.

A moment she hesitated ere she replied, and then asked, quietly, but in a cold tone:

"Why have you not been here before, Claude Clinton?"

"Hold! that is a name that is not pleasant on the lips of Eve Ainslie," quickly said the man, while his face became a shade paler.

"The name of Eve Ainslie is also buried, as well as that of Eve Clinton—which, did I so desire, I could claim legally," sneered the woman.

"Where are your proofs that you have a right to that name?" asked Clinton Clarendon, while his face became ashen in hue, at the memories that swept over his soul.

"I ask for no proofs; you and I were legally bound together in the house of God, and as my husband I loved you—until you deserted me cruelly—"

"Hold! hear me, Eve—I fled for my life, for I believed that I had killed Mark Leslie; then I had no time for aught else than flight, and when at last I sent for you I found you had gone, none knew whither."

"Failing to find you, I sought the Far West, and accident made me of service to one who, in dying, left me his fortune, on condition that I took his name."

"Gladly I did so, for under my own had I been hunted down, with the cry of murderer in my ears, and my father had disinherited me."

"Sorrowing for you, my dearly loved wife—"

"Hold, sir! Breathe not that sacred name to me. To you, as well as to others, my name is Miss Erskine."

The man seemed more hurt than offended, and resumed, in a saddened tone:

"Sorrowing for you, a disheartened man, I came to this quiet country and purchased a small plantation home, and there I have lived ever since."

"Imagine then my joy, my astonishment, at suddenly finding you, Eve; but your manner, your new name, made me feel that you would remain unknown to me, and I crushed back the cry of delight that had sprung to my lips—for I felt that in your own good time you would make all known to me."

"And you have awaited weeks to find out," said Eve, in a mock kindly tone, and as though touched by the earnest manner of the man before her.

"Important business called me away, Eve, and I was compelled to go—otherwise I should have been here long before this; but to your party I could not come, as I did not care to meet you when surrounded by strangers."

"It would have been all the same, for either alone, or when surrounded by strangers, I will be always to you what I now am—"

"And that is, Eve—"

"Miss Erskine—the daughter of Colonel Erskine, of Wildidle," and the woman spoke with a degree of pride and pleasure which she felt would annoy the man.

Biting his lips, her companion replied:

"How is it I find you Miss Erskine, Eve?"

"You deserted me, and I had kind friends who cared for me until I found in Colonel Erskine a father."

"The deuce! then it is really true? I remember you never knew who was your father. Why, Colonel Erskine is worth his millions, and has but one son—"

"True, my brother Clarence; both Colonel Erskine and his son are rich, and well able to protect their daughter and sister," and Eve spoke with a malicious twinkle in her beautiful eyes.

"Eve, a husband has a closer claim than either father or brother, especially where they hold their relationship only in name."

"I acknowledge no right for you to call yourself my husband. You deserted me, and left me to go to my ruin, did I so desire, and I annul any bond that bound us together as man and wife."

"Your doing so does not make it so, Eve; you are my wife, and as such I intend to claim you."

"Hold, Claude Clinton! Let us understand each other. That we are man and wife, granted; but that it must remain a secret, I avow, for I will not have my plans for the future thwarted by you."

"As long as you remain here, I will keep the secret; but if you attempt, as rumor has it, to marry Captain Lambert, I will publish you to the world as my lawfully-wedded wife," and the man spoke in deadly earnest.

"Ha! ha! ha! I defy you, Claude Clinton, for, if you betray me, there shall a vengeance fall upon you of which you little dream."

"I have the power, so beware! Here comes my father; walk with me to meet him, and I swear it, be careful, or you shall know that if I fall, you shall meet a more deadly punishment. Father, this is Mr. Clarendon," and with one of her sweetest smiles, and a face upon which there was not a shadow of trouble, Eve presented her visitor to Colonel Erskine, who welcomed him most cordially to Wildidle.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE ASSASSIN.

EVE ERSKINE sat alone in her boudoir, attired in a loose wrapper, for she had retired to her room for the night.

Though near midnight, she was unable to sleep, for two hours before Clinton Clarendon had departed, after having remained to spend the evening, at the earnest request of Colonel Erskine, who seemed to like the young man exceedingly.

Between Clinton Clarendon and herself no more had passed upon the subject of their conversation upon the pier, and Eve had seen him depart pleasantly, promising to call again upon his return from the city, twenty leagues down the coast, and whither he was then bound in his little yacht.

She had watched his white sail glimmering in the

moonlight, until skurrying storm-clouds had swept up from the eastward, and then bidding her adopted father good-night, she had retired to sleep.

Too nervous to sleep, she had thrown on a loose gown, and seated herself at the window, putting out the light, and musing alone in the darkness, for ever and anon the moon was obscured by clouds, foretelling a storm.

Thus the moments swept into hours, and fatigue stole over her, until her head drooped upon her hands and she was asleep.

Suddenly she started, for there broke on her ear the sound of music rising on the night air.

Collecting her thoughts from wandering in dream-land, Eve listened, and from beneath her window came the low, soft notes of a guitar, evidently touched by a master hand.

Then a fine tenor voice floated upon the air, and Eve caught the words:

"I know not why I love thee,
Thou dost not think of me;
But still my thoughts will wander
Forever back to thee."

"And though thou ne'er didst love me,
Where'er my spirit wing,
'Twill hover 'round thy pathway
A fond, though viewless thing."

"And in that better world, love,
In Heaven's celestial clime,
Amid seraphic millions
My spirit shall seek thine."

It was a ballad that Eve had always loved, and glancing cautiously forth from the window, to catch sight of the midnight serender, Eve saw, indistinctly, a tall form gracefully leaning against the balustrade of the balcony beneath, his hands holding a guitar, his face raised in song.

Then from the shadow of the shrubbery darted a cloaked figure toward the serenader, and, as the words of the last verse were sung:

"Amid seraphic millions
My spirit shall seek thine."

the arm of the cloaked form was raised, a gleam of moonlight glittered on something held in the clenched hand, and Eve gave one loud cry of alarm.

But too late! The blow descended with telling force; the gleaming blade sunk deep into the back of the singer, who fell heavily to the ground.

"Good God! Quick! oh, quick! He has killed him!" cried Eve, in wild terror, and as the cloaked form turned and fled back into the shadow of the shrubbery, she fell to the floor in a swoon, almost like death.

The wild cry of Eve rung loudly through the house, awaking Colonel Erskine and several servants, who rushed in alarm toward the maiden's room.

Entering it, with a dread at his heart, Colonel Erskine beheld Eve, and raising her from the floor, laid her upon the bed, while he dispatched a messenger for Dr. Mayhew, who resided two miles distant from Wildidle.

Seeing that Eve was in a deep swoon, the colonel, aided by her frightened maid, attempted to restore her to consciousness; but ere she recovered, Dr. Mayhew entered the room.

With his assistance the maiden slowly returned to consciousness, and glancing wildly around, cried in thrilling tones:

"Did you capture the murderer?"

"Poor girl! she has received a fright that has made her delirious," said Colonel Erskine.

"No, I am not delirious; I am as sane as ever I was in my life."

"I saw Burt Lambert struck down by an assassin, beneath my window—quick! or the murderer will escape—oh! father, let him not escape."

Springing from the bed, in spite of resistance, Eve ran to the window and glanced out.

There was visible a dark form lying upon the ground beneath.

Colonel Erskine, Dr. Mayhew, and the servants, all saw now what had given poor Eve such a fright, and quickly descending to the door, they rushed out and raised the form from the ground.

It was Captain Burt Lambert, and he was dead.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

ACCUSED AT THE GRAVE.

For the second time a gloom fell upon the grand old Wildidle, and its portals were crossed by Death's ruthless steps.

Swiftly through the neighborhood flew the news of Burt Lambert's assassination, and many and vague were the theories of its cause.

Then the belief gained ground that, after all, Paul Launcelot had fallen a victim to a hatred felt for the young naval officer, and again were untiring efforts made to capture the bold assassin.

Toward poor Eve every heart went forth in sympathy, for it was believed that she was really engaged to the young sea-captain, and as he was a general favorite, many were wont to say that it would be a most appropriate alliance, for young and old, rich and poor, men and women, all loved Eve Erskine.

At the request of Eve, arrangements were made to bury poor Burt in the family burying-ground of Wildidle, and accordingly his step-brother, Howard Moulton, assented.

He, poor fellow, seemed most deeply to feel the sudden death of his commander, brother and friend, and on reaching the mansion, entered the room where the body lay, and with nervous step and meditative mood slowly paced to and fro, only pausing now and then in his quarter-deck walk, to address a response to some one who spoke to him.

"Lieutenant Moulton, are you aware that your brother feared that his life would end in some such sudden manner as it has?" and Eve stood in front of the sailor, her eyes red from weeping.

"Yes, Burt has often had a presentiment of the death he has met. Miss Erskine, I would give ten years of my life to know who has done this foul crime."

"Can you remember no enemy of his past life—one who may have tracked him to his death?"

"None. I know of no enemy that Burt Lambert ever had."

Eve asked no more, but left the room to prepare for the funeral, which was to take place that afternoon—the third day since the fatal night of the assassination.

Gradually the halls and parlors of Wilddle were filled with a vast concourse of sorrowing friends, and through the mansion echoed the sound of the minister's voice, reading the service of the dead.

At length the casket was closed, shutting out forever the sight of the handsome face, white and calm, and the elegant form, clad in full uniform.

Then toward the distant burying-ground the column moved, the casket borne by the officers of the *Eaglet*, while behind followed half a hundred of seamen and marines.

The grave was reached, yawning to receive its human prey; a few words followed, a volley of musketry, and the hollow crush of the clods upon the coffin—a sound never forgotten—was heard, and Captain Burt Lambert, the gallant commander of the *Eaglet*, was left to his everlasting sleep.

Then, gradually, the crowd departed, leaving Colonel Erskine, Eve, the officers and crew of the *Eaglet*, and a few remaining friends.

At the head of the grave stood Howard Moulton, sadly gazing upon the newly-made mound; his face pale, his lips sternly set.

Then a man approached him, a stout man, with stern, cunning face, and said:

"Your name is Howard Moulton, is it not, sir?"

"It is, sir; what would you have?"

"I am very sorry, Lieutenant Moulton; but I must obey orders, sir, and I am commanded to arrest you."

"Arrest me! and why, sir?" and Howard Moulton stepped back, his hand upon his sword-hilt, his eyes flashing fire, while his officers and men stepped forward, as if to resist an insult to their commander, whom they really liked exceedingly.

"If you use force, lieutenant, I am powerless; but the law is strong, sir, and you will be taken," sullenly said the officer of the law.

"Of what am I accused, sir?" asked Howard Moulton, quietly.

"The murder of Captain Burt Lam—"

"Liar!"

With that one word hissing through his shut teeth, Howard Moulton sprung upon the constable and hurled him violently to the ground.

But then, as if his violent passion had spent itself, he said, quietly:

"I beg pardon, sir; you are doubtless but in the discharge of your duty—I surrender myself your prisoner," and he calmly folded his arms upon his broad breast, while Eve stepped forward and said:

"Surely, sir, there is some mistake—Lieutenant Moulton is the brother of Captain Lambert."

"It looks unreasonable, miss; but circumstantial evidence is against this gentleman. If he is innocent of the charge he can soon prove it; if not, I fear it will go hard with him," and the constable brushed the dirt from his clothes, for he had fallen upon the grave just filled up.

Then the crew of the *Eaglet* would have interfered, but their commander waved them back, with:

"Men, I must not resist the law. Lieutenant Harding, I leave you in command of the *Eaglet*, sir. Return with the men on board, and send my baggage to the town, for I suppose I will be put in jail there."

Sorrowfully the men touched their hats and walked away, while Howard Moulton, with no sign of emotion in his face, turned to Eve and said:

"Miss Erskine, I thank you, and you, colonel, for your belief that I could do no such crime as the one with which I am charged. One day I hope we will meet again; but now let me thank you for all that you both have done for my poor dead brother; believe me, I shall never forget you."

"Officer, I am your prisoner and await you."

The cool manner of the accused man seemed to stagger even the constable, who said:

"If you are guilty, sir, you are certainly a wonderful criminal. My buggy is at the gate, and you will have to accompany me."

With a bow to Colonel Erskine and Eve, Howard Moulton held forth his hands, and around his wrists were quickly clasped the iron cuffs, while the blood rushed violently into the handsome face of the prisoner at this disgrace.

Then the two walked away, Howard Moulton casting one glance upon the grave of Burt Lambert, and Colonel Erskine and Eve were left to return to the mansion, grieving sadly over all that had occurred, but firmly convinced that the accused was innocent.

CHAPTER XXIX.

AN ARRIVAL.

When Eve and Colonel Erskine returned from the grave, a joy suddenly welled up in their hearts, a silver lining to their cloud of gloom, for, seated upon the broad piazza, having just arrived, was none other than Clarence Erskine.

It was a joyous welcome his father and Eve gave

him, and they felt that they had a noble heart to share their tale of sorrow.

That night Clarence Erskine heard all—all that had transpired in the household of Wilddle since the arrival there of his father and Eve, and instantly he offered to defend Howard Moulton of this charge against him, and at once dispatched a note to the lieutenant in his lonely cell, telling him of his intention, for Clarence at once took the view of his innocence from the standpoint held by the colonel and his adopted sister.

As for Eve, she seemed thoroughly delighted at the arrival of Clarence, and made no secret of her joy, which greatly pleased the old colonel, while the young lawyer's sad, stern face lighted up at her kindness toward him, and after she had retired, for the night, he said to his father:

"I never saw a more beautiful woman, and I believe that her character is as lovely as her face."

"Indeed it is, my son; for I have watched her closely, and though she is a trifle fond of admiration, and perhaps a little tinged with coquetry, she certainly is as pure as an angel."

"I believe you, sir; but now let us discuss fully the sad incidents that have taken place here, and in the morning we will ride over and see this poor Moulton."

"What a grandly beautiful home you have here, father, and how sad that a shadow should thus be cast over its roof."

"It is too bad, Clarence, too bad; but all will yet come out well, and I have set my heart upon it, that there is one ray of sunshine that must ever remain at Wilddle, even if I have to marry her myself."

Clarence Erskine started; but he made no immediate reply, and shortly after bade his father good-night and retired to his room.

In the morning, after an early breakfast, the father and son drove to the town, where Howard Moulton was confined, and upon their arrival found that there was an ill-feeling gaining ground against the prisoner, for it was said that evidence would be forthcoming to hang him.

To these rumors Clarence paid no attention, but seeking out the most prominent lawyer in the place, associated himself with him for the trial, which would come off at an early day.

Having gone over the case, as it was told, with his legal associate, the three gentlemen sought the jail, and were promptly admitted.

They found Howard Moulton pacing the floor, his face pale, his eyes weary-looking, his lips sternly compressed.

Seeing Colonel Erskine he welcomed him most kindly, and shook hands with Clarence and his *confrere*, both of whom he thanked for their kindness in undertaking his case, after which he added:

"I am but a poor seaman, gentlemen, and a lieutenant's pay will go but a little way toward defraying your—"

"Hold! Lieutenant Moulton! In my mind you are falsely accused, and as the friend of my father and sister I defend you."

"I am rich and need no payment, and my friend here, Mr. Willis, has done me the honor to say that his reward is in being associated with me in this case, and, as he is also a man of wealth, he can enjoy the honor without detriment to his purse."

"Sincerely do I thank you, gentlemen, and I feel that you will have your own reward."

"It is not enough that I should sorrow deeply for poor Burt, but my grief must be accused by an accusation of assassination—to think of it, that I should be suspected of killing a man whom I have ever loved most dearly."

After a long conversation together the visitors departed, Colonel Erskine and Clarence returning once more to Wilddle.

CHAPTER XXX.

CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE.

It was a gloomy day, and yet one of intense excitement, in the little Southern town, when Howard Moulton was brought to trial for the cruel assassination of his step-brother and commanding officer.

By a strange train of circumstances many almost convincing proofs of the prisoner's guilt had been brought up, and it was believed by every one, with a few exceptions, that he had done the deed, and that his life would end on the gallows, as he deserved.

At length the court was opened, and the prisoner was brought in, calm, pale, and weary-looking.

From his seat near by, Clarence Erskine watched every proceeding with his eagle eye, and it was but a few moments before he caused the opposing counsel to fear him, the judge to respect him, and those in attendance to listen anxiously for his cutting home-thrusts at witness and opponent.

But, gradually a chain of damaging evidence began to encircle the prisoner, for it was told how once before he had slain his superior officer in a duel, and was dismissed from the navy as a punishment; then his fast life that followed his dismissal was brought up, until at length he became an officer in the revenue service, when all knew him as a moody, stern man.

Then witnesses were summoned who said that they always believed Howard Moulton to be envious of his brother's rank, for he was ten years the senior of Captain Lambert.

Again, it was proven, by the will of Burt Lambert, made at the time he was appointed to the command of the *Eaglet*, that Howard Moulton was to be his heir, for the young captain possessed a considerable fortune.

As gold is the god of most men, and women too, this testimony caused a general murmur around the crowded court-room, boding a stronger belief in the guilt of the prisoner, and many thought that they saw the real cause of the murder.

But others, the sentimentally inclined, discerned another cause for the fratricidal crime, when Eve was summoned to the witness stand, and was compelled to state whether Howard Moulton had ever been her lover.

The answer came faintly, and with reluctance, that the lieutenant had asked her to be his wife.

"Did you refuse him because you were engaged to his brother?" asked the lawyer on the prosecution.

"I declined the hand of Lieutenant Moulton; but I was never engaged to Captain Lambert," firmly replied the maiden.

This information caused a sensation in court, and many gossipers hung their diminished heads, for having so reported.

After the withdrawal of Eve, an under-officer of the *Eaglet* was called, who testified to having heard, through the open door of the cabin, a conversation between his commander and the prisoner, in which the latter said he would give his very soul to win the love of Eve Erskine.

A junior lieutenant then was placed upon the stand, who had been the officer of the deck, the night of the murder.

He stated upon oath that his commander had come from the cabin shortly after six bells—eleven o'clock—and held in his hand a guitar.

Then he had called his gig alongside, entered it and sailed away shoreward.

Half an hour after, the officer went on to reluctantly state, under the close questioning of the lawyer for the prosecution, that Lieutenant Moulton had called away the third cutter, and, entering it, had sailed away on the same course taken by the captain.

"How was Lieutenant Moulton dressed, sir?" asked the lawyer.

"In his undress uniform."

"Did he wear his cap and a cloak, sir?"

"He wore a slouch hat and heavy cloak, sir."

Eve was then recalled to the stand, and was compelled to describe the assassin as he appeared to her in her glance from the window.

Her description was that the man wore a slouch hat and heavy cloak—she did not see his face.

Here was certainly circumstantial evidence enough to cover the prisoner with guilt; but Clarence Erskine still looked confident, and his biting sarcasm in cross-questioning increased, to the delight of those of the audience who could appreciate his wit and keen hits at witness and antagonist.

Then another witness was called—Clinton Clarendon.

Eve Erskine and the colonel both started as the young planter took the stand, for they wondered how he could in any way be connected with this most unfortunate trial.

With a calm face, pale but indifferent to the gaze turned upon him, Clinton Clarendon awaited to tell his story either for or against the prisoner.

CHAPTER XXXI.

CONDEMNED.

AMID the breathless silence of the court-room Clinton Clarendon gave his testimony in a clear, earnest voice, and, with an eye that looked squarely into the face of Clarence Erskine, every time the young lawyer checked him with a question.

In a voice heard at the rear of the court-room, he said:

"Upon the night of the murder of Captain Lambert I took tea at Wilddle, with Colonel Erskine and his daughter."

"I sailed up to Colonel Erskine's in my little yacht, accompanied by my negro boatman, Buck."

"It was a little after eleven o'clock when I left the pier and stood out to sea, it being my intention to take advantage of the moonlight and run down the coast to the city."

"As it was coming on to blow I luffed up to take a reef in my sail, and as Buck and myself were resting a small boat passed me quickly, and in it I recognized Captain Lambert."

"He hailed me pleasantly, said he was going to serenade Miss Erskine, and passed on."

"As I got again under way, a second and larger boat passed, standing in the wake of the gig."

"We passed near to each other, and the single occupant of the boat saluted, and I remarked that he was carrying too much canvas for the breeze blowing."

"He made no reply, and, while he stood on toward the Wilddle pier, I held my course out of the bay."

"When near the center of the bay a squall suddenly swept down upon me, and in an instant my little boat was thrown over upon her beam-ends, and I was dashed down into the cock-pit."

"When I regained my feet, I saw with horror that my negro companion had disappeared."

"Loudly I shouted to him, but no reply coming, I set to work to drag down my sail, in the endeavor to right my boat."

"After very hard work, I got my boat right side up, and my sail aboard, and at once commenced to free the craft from water."

"While I was thus engaged, the storm increased, and glancing to windward I saw with surprise the largest of the two boats, that had before passed me, standing back toward the *Eaglet*, which was anchored under the shelter of the arm of the outer bay, two miles away."

"Astonished at the foolhardiness of a man who would risk himself in such a blow in so small a boat, I hailed him, determined to ask him to run down to me, and get aboard my far more seaworthy craft."

"He returned no reply to my hail, but laughed out loudly and wildly, at the same time shouting:

"My path is free now, now, for twice have I heard those from it who would thwart me in my love."

At once there was an intense excitement in court.

and thrice had the crowd to be called to order before they obeyed.

As for the prisoner, his face turned to the hue of death, and he wildly stared toward the witness who met his gaze with an expression of sympathy in his own eyes.

Then Howard Moulton gave a deep sigh, and his face sunk forward upon his breast.

Eve buried her beautiful face in her gloved hands, and Colonel Erskine appeared deeply moved.

The judge, the jury, even the associate lawyer for the defense, seemed to feel that the prisoner was doomed.

But Clarence Erskine's handsome, stern face never changed color, and still there shone in his eagle eyes the light of a triumphant confidence.

Again Clinton Clarendon went on:

"Notwithstanding my hailing, the boat stood on, its occupant still laughing wildly."

"Was that occupant the prisoner at the bar, sir?"

"I am sorry to say that it was, sir."

"Go on, Mr. Clarendon."

"As soon as my boat was again in readiness, I hoisted my sail and stood out of the bay—"

"Deserting your boatman to his fate, Mr. Clarendon?" put in Clarence Erskine.

"I felt that he was doomed, sir; the boom doubtless struck him, knocking him senseless, or he would have replied to my calls—or swam back to the boat, for he was a splendid swimmer."

"What did you see as you passed through the inlet, sir?"

"I saw the cutter standing across my bow on the starboard tack, and heading directly for the Eaglet, a quarter of a mile distant."

"Was the occupant of the boat still gesticulating and crying out?"

"No, sir; he was seated quietly in the stern, and I ceased to watch him more, for I stood on down the coast to the city, where I was compelled to be, the following day."

The officer who had been in charge of the deck, the night of the assassination, was then recalled and asked what time it was when Lieutenant Moulton returned on board.

"I went off at eight bells—twelve o'clock—but the officer who followed my watch said that it was some time after I turned in, and that he had come aboard in a gale, and it was a wonder how the cutter lived in the blow."

Then was it that every proof of Howard Moulton's guilt seemed to come out, and that he was a doomed man all felt.

When Clarence Erskine arose to plead for the prisoner, he was listened to amid a breathless silence, and for four hours his ringing tones held his hearers spellbound, and his telling argument changed the opinion of a few in favor of his client; but the jury was unmoved, and without leaving their box they returned the verdict:

"Guilty of murder in the first degree."

A shade of disappointment swept over the face of Clarence Erskine at this decision, and he glanced quickly toward the prisoner.

He alone seemed unmoved; he had made up his mind as to his fate, and with a calm face and iron nerve received his sentence—death on the gallows, three months from that very day.

CHAPTER XXXII.

DIAMOND CUT DIAMOND.

By his masterly effort in defense of Howard Moulton, although his splendid oratorical powers and pointed argument had proven fruitless, Clarence Erskine won for himself an enviable name.

From the time of the trial Clarence formed friends by the score, and Wilddle was constantly open to the numerous guests who flocked thither.

Among those who became constant visitors at the beautiful home, was Clinton Clarendon, who seemed strangely gay, for one of his rather moody nature.

But, though he constantly sought a private interview with Eve, she as persistently avoided it, at the same time endeavoring to prove to him that she was most devoted to Clarence Erskine.

Now, though Clarence and Eve were considered as brother and sister, it was yet known that there was no kindred blood in their veins, and that the maiden was only the adopted daughter of Colonel Erskine.

As for the young lawyer, he was certainly glad that Eve was not a blood relation, for his heart had gone forth to her with all its strength and passion, and he intended, could he win her love, to make her his wife.

With Eve, her whole thoughts, by day and by night, were of Clarence, and she felt that to gain his love were a recompense for all her sufferings in the past.

Thus stood matters at Wilddle, when at length Clinton Clarendon was able to catch Eve alone in the library, the colonel and Clarence having driven to town to see Howard Moulton in his lonely cell, for they had not yet been won over to the belief that he was guilty of the crime for which he was condemned to die upon the gallows.

Having landed at the pier, Clinton Clarendon approached the house, and seeing Eve reading at the library window, cautiously entered the room, unnoticed by her.

"At last we meet alone again, Eve."

Eve started to her feet; her face flushed and then calmed, while she said, quickly:

"Had I desired to see you alone, sir, it could have been often arranged."

"Why this cold manner toward me, Eve?"

"I feel coldly toward you; you are nothing to me."

"I am your husband."

"Prove it!"

"Shall I prove it? Shall I bring proof that you were married to me, fifteen months ago, in a little church on the—"

"You can bring no such proof. I defy you to."

"A word from me in the ears of Clarence Erskine would soon show him that 'all that glitters is not gold.'"

"Clarence Erskine would not believe you on oath; he doubted your testimony regarding poor Moulton, and—so did I."

Clinton Clarendon turned pale with rage, while he hissed forth:

"Doubt all that you please, but I swear that this love affair between you and Erskine shall stop."

"And how will you stop it?"

"Ha! your own words betray you; there is something then between you?" fiercely flung out the man.

"There *will* be, for I know it is the intention of Clarence to ask me to become his wife, and—I intend to accept."

"Good God! Can you be so base, Eve Ainslie?"

"A most moral man art thou to upbraid me with baseness! Yes, I intend to marry Clarence Erskine."

"You seem to forget that you are already a wife," sneered the infuriated man.

"God knows I forget nothing. You claim me as your wife, and again I say—*prove it*."

"I will prove it. I will bring the proof of your marriage to me, by summoning the minister who—"

"Hold! Claude Clinton; you cannot summon up the dead!"

Staggering back, his hand went to his pale forehead, and he seemed momentarily overcome; but recovering himself quickly, while her eyes looked triumphantly upon him, he said:

"You know then that he is dead? You doubtless saw an account of his death in the papers?"

"Yes, I saw that he was cruelly murdered—"

"It matters not, Eve, that he is dead nor how he died; the records still exist, and—"

"Ha, ha, ha, Claude Clinton! I hold that which you would give your right hand to possess!"

"What in Heaven's name do you mean?"

"Would you know? I will tell you: it is the *stained record of our marriage*—stained with the blood of the old minister who died in trying to preserve it from—ha—ha!" and she smiled her triumph.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

DEFIED.

IN spite of his nerve the man trembled at this bold announcement, and asked, faintly:

"Where did you get it?"

"I will tell you; and then you will see that I can marry Clarence Erskine without any interference on your part; nay, more, you shall be invited to the wedding, a far different one, by the way, from that which you and I once witnessed in the little Silver Creek church."

"Would you like to hear all about how the wronged and deserted wife became possessed of the record you would have destroyed?"

"I would."

"Listen, then. When you struck down Mark Leslie, and fled for your life, I went to the wounded man, and he told me that he knew my secret, and advised me to leave the University at once."

"Acting upon his advice, I took a roll of bills from your desk, and left, driving to town that night, for you may remember how brightly shone the moon."

"By a strange chance I took the road you had gone on horseback—the one by the Silver Creek church—shall I go on?"

"Yes; I am listening."

"As I was passing, a fluttering piece of paper attracted my eye—"

"Great God!"

"Well you may cry out. I sprang from the vehicle, took it up, and read thereon the record of *our marriage*."

The man leaned heavily against the window for support—his lips were of ashen hue, his eyes glittering wildly, and he trembled violently, while his voice seemed powerless to utter a sound.

"But that is not all, sir, for I beheld a fresh stain upon the record—a stain of blood!"

"Then I knew that you had gone that way; but, to convince myself of the truth, I entered the sacred edifice alone, and—Shall I tell you what I saw there, lying where the moonlight streamed in upon him?"

He seemed to supplicate her to spare him, yet he spoke no word, and with a cruel smile she went on:

"The driver saw me enter the church; the next day the murder was known, and I was tracked, arrested, and accused of being the murderer of an old man, whose only crime was in marrying me to you."

"Clarence Erskine saved me from the gallows, and I love him as passionately as I hate you."

"Now you can see that there is no proof of *our marriage*, and that I can become the wife of the man whom I love without you raising one finger to prevent. Yes, I can now defy you, and I do here defy you to do your worst."

Clinton Clarendon slowly turned away, and without a word left the mansion.

A moment after Eve saw him spring into his boat and sail away homeward.

Then she laughed a laugh that had a certain triumphant ring in its tone, and said, half aloud:

"So far I am ahead of the bounds. He dare not hurt me, for he knows his neck is in the gallows' noose and I hold the end of the rope."

"Well, I have risked much, but it is to gain much—for I love Clarence Erskine with all my heart. No, I forget: *I am without a heart!*"

So saying, she tossed her haughty head and ran

out to greet Colonel Erskine and his son, who just then drove up to the door, and as they looked upon the beautiful, joyous face that welcomed them, they little dreamed that it was a mask that hid an abyss of sin beneath.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE GIPSY FORTUNE-TELLER.

A FEW few days after the bitter interview between Eve and Clinton Clarendon the former was seated in the orange-grove arbor one pleasant afternoon, engaged in sketching a view of the mansion, with the bay, cliffs and ocean beyond.

One would have believed that the spot, where poor Paul Lambert fell, would have called up sad thoughts to Eve, and caused her to shun the arbor; but her face was as tranquil as the sea in a calm, and her smile as bright as a ray of the setting sun.

Suddenly a shadow fell upon her, and, with a cry of alarm, Eve sprang to her feet, for a strange-looking being stood before her.

It was a woman, of perhaps sixty years of age with long, flowing white hair, a face as dark as an Indian, and shaded beneath a broad felt sombrero.

She was dressed in a queer mixture of male and female attire, and around her neck were a number of chains, some of gold, several of silver and others of beads, while her fingers were covered with rings.

In her hand she carried a long staff, painted black, red and green, and the glitter of her black eyes was certainly not reassuring to Eve's nerves, who asked, with all the calmness she could command:

"Can I do aught to serve you, that you come here?"

"I beg from neither man nor woman, girl; I am a Gipsy queen and my feet track the soil of many lands."

"The beauty of your home lured me, and I came hither to gaze upon it. Seeing you, I made bold to approach, for I am one unto whom power is given to look into the human heart and read there the hidden mysteries of the future."

The woman spoke with a manner and voice most impressive, and almost unconsciously Eve, strong as was her own magnetism, felt her influence, and replied:

"I have heard of those who read the fortunes of others, and a year ago I would have been glad to have had you tell mine—but now I feel that I have it in my own hands, to make or mar my future life; but stay! I would know of the past, for you certainly can tell of what has already happened if you know that which is to come."

"I can tell you of the past, maiden—of the mystery that hangs over your life."

Eve shuddered, in spite of herself, and replied:

"There is a mystery hanging over my past life which I could never discover."

"I would know it; so tell it me if you can."

"Hold forth your hand, and let me see its lines," almost ordered the woman.

Eve did as directed, and, glancing alternately into the tiny palm and the beautiful face, the woman began in a low, monotonous voice:

"You were born under a lucky star, girl, although your birth was an unfortunate one for your mother."

"She, poor girl, had loved a young and dashing man, the son of a wealthy neighbor, and he had professed love for her."

"Secretly the two were married, and it remained a secret until your birth discovered it to your mother's parents."

"But they disbelieved the story, for the young couple had been married by an itinerant preacher—you see I read all this here—"

"Go on, woman, I believe you are near the truth," impatiently said Eve.

"Well, the certificate was lost, the preacher could not be found, and your mother was turned in disgrace from her parents' home."

"She was, however, cared for by her husband, and you were reared up in luxury, and given every advantage of education, until your father tired of your mother, for her charms faded rapidly, and he deserted her."

"With what money she could obtain from what had been given her by her husband in the past, your mother, I see here, went away, leaving you to the care of others."

"At length misfortune overtook those in whose care you had been left, and again your mother claimed you—"

"You are wrong there, woman; I went to live with a woman who claimed to be my aunt."

"Ha! ha! You so believed her; it was your mother, girl, and she had so changed that, girl that you were, you failed to recognize her. See, I read all that I say here; here are the lines."

"Hating you now, because you were so like the man she had once loved, and who had deserted her, she made your life a very hell—until—"

"Until what?" asked Eve, as the Gipsy hesitated.

"Yes, the lines in your hand divide here—until you fled from her home."

"So far, true; now tell me of my father."

"Ah! his was a life of crime, for I see it stamped here in your palm."

"Yes, he went forth in the world as a single man, and with his powers of fascination, and his wealth, won hearts but to destroy them."

"At length he won the love of a pure young girl, who, trusting him, consented to become his wife."

"Need I say, girl, that it was a false marriage, for your mother still lived?"

"But blood came between your father and the young girl he so cruelly deceived—for he fell by the

hand of one who avenged the shame thus cast upon her."

"My father is dead, then?"

"Yes; but your mother yet lives."

"I care not for her," said Eve, impatiently; "and now, here is gold for you, for your story, false as it is, has certainly been entertaining. It is getting late and you had better hasten on, for this is not a healthy neighborhood for tramps."

So saying, and with a light laugh, Eve gathered up her drawing materials and hastened away, leaving the Gipsy fortune-teller gazing after her.

At length a bitter smile crept over the dark face, and she murmured:

"Go on, my brave beauty; but a day of reckoning comes to all such as thou art."

Without another word the woman walked rapidly away, and soon disappeared in the dense forest's gloom.

CHAPTER XXXV.

FORTUNE HER SLAVE.

UPON returning to the mansion, Eve, for a while, felt a little disturbed in mind, for the pretended past-reading of the Gipsy queen had made an unpleasant impression upon her.

Notwithstanding her good sense and her education, a vein of superstition ran through her which caused her to put faith in what the woman had told her, especially as she could not contradict her for of her past life, or rather of her parents, she was lamentably ignorant.

Therefore, even though she endeavored to make the woman believe she had spoken falsely, she gave credit to all that had been told her.

For her mother she cared nothing; for her father she had always felt a romantic affection, a longing to know him, when old enough to appreciate the love between a parent and his daughter, and it grieved her to feel that she would never meet him, that the grave hid him forever from her view; while over her swept a feeling for revenge toward the man who had placed him there—a fierce desire to end his murderous days in the despair and gloom attending a known and sudden death.

So far Fortune had certainly been the slave of the bold woman who lived for self alone, and admitted to herself that she was without a heart.

True, she felt most kindly toward Colonel Erskine, and her manner was that of a most loving daughter; but at heart she felt for him just as she did for the wind that drove her sail-boat over the waves, the horse that bounded beneath her weight, the flowers that perfumed the air; if necessary, she could give all up without a sigh.

Without heart she was, excepting in one respect—her wild, passionate love for Clarence Erskine.

She remembered him when first she had seen him—that afternoon in the woodland, when he stood face to face with the dark, stern man whom his hand had sent to the grave.

The letter she had found had told why he had sought the life of Colonel Roselle—because he believed him the betrayer of poor Florice, his sister.

Then Colonel Erskine had told her all the sad story, never once dreaming that Eve knew as much as did himself—nay, more, for she had seen the fatal duel and had read Florice's letter.

Then in her heart came pity for Clarence, for she knew that he suffered for having taken the life of a man whom he afterward found was not guilty of the crime of which he was accused.

Again, the devotion to her of the young lawyer, his legal struggle in her defense, his noble nature, splendid bearing, and handsome face, added to his courtly and winning manners, and trust in her, a waif, all drew her toward him with a love that was immeasurable especially in one of her wildly passionate nature and strong feelings.

Though a waif, a deserted wife, a supposed youth, a suspected murderer, Fortune had proven her very slave through all, and she so intended to play her cards that it should never fail her.

That she would deceive the only man she loved, the only being in the world she really cared for, she well knew; but she argued that where "ignorance was bliss, 'twere folly to be wise," and so long as Clarence believed her his wife, it was sufficient.

Of Clinton Clarendon she felt no fear; he was a bold, bad man, she knew; but she held the end of the rope that would strangle him out of life, and she felt that his lips were sealed as close as the tomb.

Occasionally there would sweep over her a pang of remorse at the part she was playing; but she would smother the feeling, and in the excitement of her bold game to hold Fortune her slave, feel the joy that a chieftain might upon beating back his enemy and holding him constantly in hand.

As beautiful as a dream of womanhood she certainly was, and she was conscious of her power to make or mar a man's happiness for life.

And so thought Clarence Erskine, as he stood gazing in upon her, as she sat in the music-room, idly running her hands over her harp, a present from himself to her.

"Eve, I am glad you are here, for I have been seeking you."

"I am glad to know it, Clarence. Sit down beside me and I will sing you your favorite song, 'Waiting.'"

"No, Eve, I would rather talk to you now, and yet those lines in 'Waiting'—"

"Come, for my arms are empty,

Come, for the day is long,

And turn the darkness into glory,"

are just what I would now ask of you, Eve, for my arms yearn to infold you to my heart; the day is long without you, and you alone can turn the darkness of my life into glory, for around my inmost life

you have entwined yourself, as does the ivy around even a lightning-blasted tree."

The allusion to the gloom of his life brought to Eve's mind the fatal duel; his speaking of the "lightning-blasted tree" recalled that deadly scene where God's rebuke rent in twain a lofty tree, with one stroke of heaven's forked fire. These thoughts subdued Eve, and her bosom rose and fell; a rosy blush stole over her face, and her dreamy eyes were raised to the man before her, with a look of perfect love.

Then, in a voice of wondrous sweetness, she said:

"Clarence, you have made me what I am—and heart, body, ay, soul, I am yours."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

A FALSE MARRIAGE.

A HALO of joy seemed to have at last fallen upon the hearts of the trio at Wildidle, when Clarence and Eve made known to Colonel Erskine that they were to become man and wife.

"God bless you, my son, and may He always guard you, my daughter. No joy of my life was ever greater than the present one, for I have longed for this hour to come."

"Now, Clarence, what do you intend to do?"

"Well, father, my duties will call me back to the city in about two weeks, and Eve has consented, with your permission, to go with me as my wife. You might also accompany us, sir."

"No, I will remain here; and, my son, you must give up your law and come back to Wildidle, and we can be so happy here together."

"I will think of it, sir."

"Right, and decide as I wish you to; but two weeks is a very short time. Why, you will not be able to have the grand wedding I would like to give you, and a marriage in the church."

"Father, I detest all that makes a bride conspicuous, and I verily believe that most marriages in churches are more for show than sacredness."

"It places the bride in a bold position, the object of a hundred curious eyes, and many, frequently, not very kind criticisms, at a time when she should feel most retiring. No, no; I detest public marriages, and believe the place to get a wife is in her own home, not in a crowded church, dishonored by a curious rabble of gossipers and newsmongers."

"I agree with Clarence, papa Erskine, for I wish to avoid becoming an object of curiosity."

"Very well; you can be married here quietly, and then drive to town and take the train, the same day if you wish. Eve, command me for all that you wish for your trousseau."

Thus it was decided, and so quietly were the arrangements made for the wedding that the day rolled round without the affair becoming even generally known in the neighborhood.

Only a few persons were invited, the families of the officiating clergyman and of Dr. Mayhew, so that the other friends of Wildidle could not feel slighted at being forgotten.

It was a bright and glorious day, the wedding morn, and Clarence Erskine's face had lost considerable of its sternness, and Eve seemed full of quiet joy, while Colonel Erskine was almost wild one moment with delight, and miserable the next with regret, at the thought that the sunshine of his home was going from him for many days.

At length the young couple took their stand before the minister, and if Eve felt the base crime she was committing, no evidence of such feeling rested upon her brilliantly-beautiful face, for, dressed in a dark-gray traveling suit, with hat and gloves to match, she looked exquisitely lovely.

Then the marriage-service began, and the deep-toned voice of the clergyman, unmindful of wrongdoing, unknowing that he was performing a false marriage, pronounced them man and wife.

Once and once only there was a quiver of Eve's nether lip—but the emotion was instantly overcome and clearly she responded to the questions asked by the minister.

Then followed kind wishes and congratulations from those present, all of whom had some costly gift for the bride, and after luncheon, in which the young couple were toasted in rare old wine, the carriage drove round to the door, and entering it Clarence Erskine and Eve were driven rapidly away to town. There they took the train for New York city, where it was their intention to pass a few weeks.

Thus was Eve guilty of crime in the sight of God; but, in defiance of all law, she had gained her ambitious ends.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE PLOTTERS.

WHEN the Gipsy queen turned away from the orange-grove arbor, she walked rapidly through the forest, until she came to a carriage-drive winding back into the country.

Here, apparently awaiting her, was a horseman, idly switching the leaves from a tree with his riding-whip.

He was a man of good figure, and had a frank, manly face, the lower part of which was covered with a long, gold-brown, silken beard, which completely hid his mouth.

His eyes were restless, keen, and fearless, while his hair was worn long, falling upon his shoulders.

Dressed in a suit of dark cloth, with his pants stuck in his boot-tops, and a slouch hat upon his head, any one would have taken him for a wealthy country planter.

Catching sight of the woman he said simply:

"Well?"

"I have seen her; I had a long talk with her in an arbor near the mansion, and I pretended to read to

her a leaf of her past life—telling her the whole truth, but it made no impression upon her."

"I feared so; she is utterly bad, I have begun to believe."

"She is a woman without a heart; but I could do no more, for she left me, and I have returned to know what to do."

"I have been thinking that she intends to marry Clarence Erskine, I feel assured, yet it will not be for some time, I hope."

"This must be prevented, as you know, and in the mean time I must see Claude Clinton, alias Clinton Clarendon."

"You do not fear recognition?"

"No; none of those who once knew me would recognize me now. You may go back to the village, for your vehicle has only gone up the road and will soon return for you. Remain there until you hear from me."

"You had better beware of Claude Clinton. Should he recognize you your life would be the penalty," said the woman.

"No fear; I will seek his home to-night, and as it is miles away, I must be off. Your wagon will soon return; good-by, and may we be successful in our present work."

"God grant it," answered the Gipsy, as the man rode rapidly away.

A moment after a wagon came up, with a negro driver; into this the woman sprang and drove off in another direction from that taken by the horseman, who kept on at a rapid pace for several miles, until he came to a lonely road leading into the swamp.

Turning into this he pressed on, until he suddenly drew rein, for the form of a man lay by the roadside.

It was a negro, worn down by sickness, and with a severe wound, not yet healed, upon his head.

"Well, my man, you seem to be suffering and in distress," said the horseman, kindly.

"Yis, sah, I is in de greatist distress; you is a stranger in dese parts, ain't you, massa?" responded the negro, speaking with difficulty.

"Yes, my man, I am a stranger here; but can I do any thing for you?"

"Massa, you seems kind to de poor old nigga, sah, and you can be ob sarvice, 'kase I've got a hard story to tell, sah."

"You seem as though you had been treated harshly, my man, and were almost starved."

"I's got all I want to eat, boss, but my mind ain't right, 'kase I feel bad toward a gemman who didn't do right by me."

"You have been severely punished by your master, and ran away, I suppose?"

"It ar' worse dan dat, boss, much worse, sah. Be you in a hurry, sah?"

"I am going down to Mr. Clarendon's plantation. Is it far from here? If not, I can pause awhile."

The negro shrunk back at the name, and cried, as if in mortal terror:

"You ain't a friend o' his'n, is yer boss?"

Struck by the manner of the negro, the horseman replied:

"No, I wished to see him on business only; do you know him?"

"Yis, sah; he was my boss, my massa; not as I b'longed to him, sah, for you see my own good massa set me free when he die; but Massa Clarendon, he buy my old massa's place, and I jist continue on to lib wid him, sah, for I didn't have no home; but, boss, you has bin misdirected wrong, sah; dis ain't de road to Cliffside."

"Indeed, I was told to turn to the right, by a gentleman, when I asked the way."

"Yis, sah; but you tuk de wrong turnin'; de right one, sah, am a mile back. Massa, you don't got no leetle drop o' wheesky, and chaw o' 'baccy, hab you, sah, for poor nigga, for I feel mighty bad."

"Yes, here is a flask of brandy; help yourself, and here are a few cigars which may be better than a chew of tobacco."

The negro took a long pull at the flask, and then put one of the cigars in his mouth to serve as a "chaw o' 'baccy," and at once invigorated thereby, he said:

"Massa, you is a good man to dis poor nigga, and, sah, I would like to tell you how it is I is hidin' here in de swamp like a wolf, and Massa Clarendon am de cause."

Struck by the earnest manner of the negro, the horseman replied:

"I will hear all you have to say, and if you are useful to me, my man, you shall not need a friend; but may not some one pass here?"

"Dey don't many folkses cum dis way, sah, but s'pose you go wid de ole nigger to he home in de swamp?"

Without a word the horseman acquiesced, and the negro led the way further and further into the dense swamp, until he came to a small hill, or mound, out of which were growing several large trees.

Among these was located a small hut, made of logs and brush, and inside there was evidence of its being occupied.

Dismounting and hitching his horse, the stranger entered the humble abode, and glanced curiously around him.

There was a cane bed in one corner, an old musket on a rack, a three-legged table, and a fireplace, around which were several cooking utensils.

Upon the wall hung a side of bacon and two bags, one containing meal, the other ground coffee.

An old overcoat and a blanket, the worse for wear, were all the clothing visible.

"Dis am my home, massa, and dat debble ob a man, Massa Clarendon, am de cause why I lib heur; but I's got one friend who bring me perwisions, and has tuk car' ob me while I was hurted, for you

see, sah, I's been putty low down from dis blow on my head, sah."

"Yes, you seem to have indeed had a hard time of it; now take another pull at my brandy flask, and tell me all you know about Mr. Clinton Clarendon, as he is called."

As an hour passed ere the horseman came out of the hut, he doubtless found the negro's story a most interesting one, and there was an expression on his face that showed he had gained some important news.

Shaking hands with his new-found friend, and leaving him his flask, the horseman mounted and rode away, while the negro chuckled forth, with an expression of joy upon his emaciated face:

"I guess as how Massa Clarendon done got de debble on he track now, sure, and dis nigger ain't berry sorry ef he hab, noways you kin fix it."

"Aha, Massa Clarendon, dis ole nigger chile is gwine to sarcumvent you yit."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

DRAWING THE WEB.

THE day after the false marriage at Wildidle a horseman rode up to the door of that mansion, and handed his bridle-rein to a negro in waiting.

It was the same personage who had met the Gipsy queen in the forest, and afterward the negro in the swamp.

Ascending the steps he asked to see Clarence Erskine.

"Massa Clarence am gone Norf, sah, but de colonel am in," replied the butler.

"Ask him if I can see him, please—say Mr. Markham."

The stranger was asked into the library, by the polite butler, and a few moments after Colonel Erskine entered the room.

"You would see my son, sir, I believe; pray be seated."

"Yes, sir, I called upon Mr. Erskine, and regret his absence. Will he soon return?"

"He has gone off on a bridal tour—"

"Good God! I am too late. Did Clarence Erskine marry Eve Ainslie?"

"He did, sir; but why this startled manner, can I ask?" and Colonel Erskine seemed greatly surprised at the manner of the man, who turned as pale as death.

"Colonel Erskine, I owe to you a full explanation, sir, and I will tell you all, and you must prepare to hear some most unpleasant news."

"Believe me, I regret exceedingly that I was not here to prevent the marriage. Hold, please, and hear me; but I was called North on important business two weeks ago, and expected to have returned long ere Mr. Erskine was ensnared into a false alliance."

"What! do you dare to come here to insult me in my own home?"

"No, sir, I have come here to tell you the truth, and let me here say, sir, that I am a detective, working up one of the most remarkable cases of misplaced confidence, fraud and crime ever known."

"I hope you speak advisedly, sir, and will at once tell me how my son and his wife are mixed up in this affair."

In a frank, earnest tone Mr. Markham began a recital, which, as he proceeded, blanched the face of Colonel Erskine as white as his hair, and caused him to tremble with emotion that he in vain tried to control.

After a long conversation the two gentlemen arose and proceeding to the pier went on board the little sloop-yacht lying there.

The crew had already been summoned by their master, three stalwart negro boatmen, and in a little while more the pretty craft was dashing swiftly through the waters.

The wind was fresh, and a run of three hours brought them to the Cliffside pier, the home of Clinton Clarendon.

Having seen the yacht standing in toward his pier, and recognizing it as the Wildidle yacht, Clinton Clarendon had gone down to meet his guests, and as they stepped ashore said, pleasantly:

"Colonel, I am glad to see you, sir; Mr. Markham, I believe we met some two weeks since, when you called to see if I would sell my dearly-loved Cliffside."

Colonel Erskine seemed so glad to see the young planter that he extended both hands, which were at once grasped by Clinton Clarendon.

Instantly Mr. Markham stepped forward, and in the twinkling of an eye a pair of spring handcuffs encircled the wrists of Clinton Clarendon, ironing them securely together.

As pallid as a human face can turn, surprised, entrapped, furious, Clinton Clarendon staggered back, hissing forth:

"What mean you, sir, by this outrage?" and the manacled hands endeavored to draw a weapon from the breast-pocket.

"Simply, that you are my prisoner, Clinton Clarendon, *alias* Claude Clinton, for I arrest you in the name of the law," said Mr. Markham, calmly.

"And why, sir?" was all the enraged man could say.

"For crimes too numerous to enumerate now. Hold! move one inch, and I'll cheat the gallows of your life!" and the cold muzzle of a revolver pressed the temple of the entrapped man.

"Into that yacht, sir; and, mind you, no resistance."

Claude Clinton, as he was now known to be, glanced nervously around, as if longing to call his slaves to his rescue; but, fearing that it would but seal his doom, and not knowing what were the charges or proofs against him, he sneered gloomily,

and obeyed the stern order by taking a seat upon the cushioned seat of the yacht, while his lips moved, and Colonel Erskine, scarcely less pale than the prisoner, caught the words:

"She has betrayed me; I did not believe it of her."

A run up the coast of several hours, and Claude Clinton found himself an inmate of the same prison in which Howard Moulton was awaiting his doom of an ignominious death.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

AN UNWELCOME VISITOR.

IN the luxuriously-furnished home, where had passed his youthful years in happiness, with his father, mother, and Florice, sat Clarence Erskine and his lovely bride.

Nearly a month had gone by since their marriage, and not a shadow had dimmed their joy.

Suddenly there came a ring at the door-bell, and a card was brought in, the visitor desiring to see Mr. and Mrs. Erskine.

"Mr. Markham, his card reads; I do not know him, and this stormy night I was in hope we would have no visitors; but ask him in, Jason," said Clarence.

The next moment Mr. Markham entered, and bowing to Clarence and his wife, said, calmly:

"Mr. Erskine, I have called upon you, sir, upon a matter most important; is there any fear of outside interruption?"

"None, sir. Here, Jason, see that we are not disturbed under any circumstances. Be seated, Mr. Markham."

The man remained standing, and while his keen eyes flashed from one face to the other, he said:

"It is a most painful duty I have to perform, sir, but I will not flinch from it, and I beg you to hear me patiently and be brave under the blow which—"

"My father!" cried Clarence, in alarm, while Eve turned deadly pale.

"Is well, sir; I saw him a few days since at Wildidle. He knows of what I would make known to you, and asked me to hand you this letter."

"He would have come on with me, but the shock was too great, and he returned to his home."

Clarence almost jerked the letter from the speaker's hand, broke the seal, and read:

"My Son:

"May God give you strength to hear all that I have heard. It is true, as you will find to your cost."

"Your sympathizing FATHER."

"Perhaps I had better retire," said Eve, rising.

"No, you will remain here, madam; it is of *you* that I would speak," sternly said Mr. Markham, and with scared face the guilt-accused woman sunk back into a chair, while Clarence said sternly, through his set teeth:

"I am ready to hear all you would say, sir."

"Mr. Erskine," commenced Mr. Markham, calmly, and in an exceedingly distinct voice. "Two years ago I was a student at a well-known university in this State—your wife may remember me when I say that my name is—*Markham Leslie*."

"Mark Leslie—yes, I remember," slowly said Eve, and then the beauty of her face became marred by a cold, stony look; but in the same distinct voice Mark Leslie continued:

"One of my fellow-students—one who had been my best friend in our boyhood—when at college began to lead a wild and dissipated life, and, as he was engaged to my only sister, I remonstrated with him, but all to no avail, for daily his escapades increased, until at last I felt convinced that he had lured to ruin a young and beautiful girl."

"Gradually the whole truth dawned upon me, until I was at last convinced, and then I sought out that fellow-student, Claude Clinton—"

"Ha! that was the name of your friend, Eve?" said Clarence Erskine, hoarsely.

"Yes."

It was all that she said; her lips could not articulate more.

"I sought out Claude Clinton and made known my suspicions, and—to conceal one crime, he committed another, and struck a blow at my life."

"Then he fled from the college, and no one knew what had become of him."

"I lingered for weeks between life and death, and at length arose from my bed to learn with horror that my darling sister had fled from her home and her friends, none knew whither."

"I felt that I knew, and from that day I devoted myself to the one aim of my life—revenge upon Claude Clinton."

"Obtaining the authority of a United States detective, I started forth upon my work—to track Claude Clinton to his death. Now I will go on to tell, Mr. Erskine, the whole story of my discoveries: will you listen to me?"

"I will."

CHAPTER XL.

THE DETECTIVE'S STORY.

STILL standing, and leaning gracefully against the mantle, his arms folded upon his breast, Mark Leslie, who had devoted his life to becoming an untiring sleuth-hound of the law, resumed his story:

"To begin at the beginning, I had to trace Claude Clinton from the time of his university life, and having ample means at my command, I set parties to work on his track, until I learned that he had, five months before he struck at my life, rescued from drowning a young girl, the supposed niece of a woman who lived upon the opposite bank of the river from that on which the college stood."

"This woman I at once sought, and, gaining her confidence, I learned that the girl was not her niece,

but *her daughter*, and that hers was a story of woman's love and trust, and man's inhumanity and perfidy."

"I need not tell why it was that the woman hid the secret of the girl's birth from her, and her near kindred to herself; but she hated the maiden because in her was an image of her father, the man who had so cruelly treated the mother."

"Such was the girl whose life Claude Clinton had saved, and my inquiries and search soon discovered that the maiden had secretly left her home, an unhappy one I admit, with Claude Clinton, and with him had entered into one of the boldest games at deception ever practiced."

"From her home the thoughtless maiden went with her lover to a lonely country church on Silver Creek, and was there wedded, by the old clergyman, to the man for whom she had given up all."

Clarence Erskine groaned aloud, and leaning forward buried his face in his hands, while Eve sat like a marble statue, so cold, so stony, so white she looked.

But the merciless detective went on with his story, his face growing more stern as he proceeded:

"From the Silver Creek church the young couple went to town, and there the maiden was metamorphosed into a fine-looking youth, for her wealth of beautiful hair was sacrificed, and she stepped into a full suit of male attire, and, with an addition to her name, entered the university as a student."

"So wonderfully well conceived was the deception that neither the professors nor students suspected the fraud, though the graceful form, and small hands and feet of the handsome student were often remarked."

"Watching Claude Clinton as closely as I did, on account of his connection with my sister, I soon had my suspicions aroused, and suspicion ripened into certainty; so I sought him and told him what I had discovered—that the youth was a maiden in disguise."

"Then I did not know they were married; but I nearly lost my life by my accusation, and when I arose from my sick bed Claude Clinton and his companion had gone—the latter at my advice I believed, for, wishing to save her from shame, I told her I knew her as she was."

"Tracking Claude Clinton from the start, I found that he began to leave a bloody trail behind him, for his first act was to take the life of the clergyman who had married him—determined to wipe out all proof of his marriage, for, intending to desert his young wife, he wished no record to exist against him."

"In securing the leaf from the church register, on which was recorded his marriage, I suppose the clergyman resisted, and lost his life."

"I believed, until a short time ago, that Claude Clinton destroyed that record—but he had not; he had lost it in his flight, and the one who found it was his wife, following along the same road a few hours after."

"That wife, still believed to be a youth, was arrested for the murder of the clergyman, tried, and cleared by your able argument, Mr. Erskine—"

"God have mercy!" groaned the crushed man.

Eve yet remained silent.

"Saved from the gallows, her career you know, so I will go on to relate what followed in the mad course pursued by Claude Clinton."

"As was feared, my poor sister Louise fled from her home with the man she so wildly loved, and, believing the story he told her, of his having to fly for killing a fellow-student in a duel, and little knowing that it was her own brother he had struck down, she went with him to the Far West, and there he settled down."

"Chance caused him to save an old miner, a man of considerable means, and a bachelor."

"To his home Claude Clinton took this old man, and, with no friends or relatives in the world, the miner made Clinton the heir to his fortune, mostly in gold."

Some time after, that old man, whose name was Clarendon, was found dead in the forest, a bullet-wound in his head and his scalp gone.

"He had been slain by Indians, it was said and believed—but the red paint and feathers of the Indian concealed the evil face of Claude Clinton, and the bullet in Clarendon's skull just fitted the bore of his heir's rifle."

"Again provided with funds, Claude Clinton and his wife—for so Louise believed herself, as a mock ceremony had been performed, I forgot to say—left for San Francisco."

There the evil man led a fast life for a while, and then tiring of poor Louise, as he had of his deserted wife, he fled from her, leaving her there to starve—or to seek her own living at the loss of her soul."

"But, thank God! Louise wrote to me, and I at once went to her, for up to that time I was at a loss to find Claude Clinton's whereabouts."

"I took poor Louise back to her childhood's home, and most kindly our parents received her, for they saw that she was sinking into her grave, her heart broken by the severe blow dealt her."

"Anxious to do all they could for her, and prolong her life, our parents took her to Europe; but, alas! in sunny Italy she found a grave, and *Claude Clinton was her murderer*."

"Once upon the trail of the man I so longed to meet, I tracked him until, by a strange chain of circumstances, I learned that a person answering his description had purchased a small plantation on the southern coast."

"Thither I went, and found not only Claude Clinton, but his deserted wife, living not twenty miles apart, and more did I discover—that each had become aware of the other's presence in the neighborhood, and with an utter disregard of honor the wo-

man had determined to marry one who had proven her noblest benefactor.

"I needed some one to aid me then in working up the case against the two, so I wrote to her mother to come on at once.

"She obeyed, and became my ally, disguising herself as a Gipsy queen, and in other ways, finding out all the internal workings of the home where her daughter resided, loved as dearly and cared for as lavishly by her benefactors as though she had been in reality of kindred blood.

"The death of my father, just at the time I was drawing in my net to entrap Claude Clinton and his designing wife, called me North for a short while, and upon my return, I learned, with horror, Mr. Erskine, that Eve Ainslie had, in defiance of God and man, wickedly become, as you believed, your wife.

"Then I sought out your father, and to him I told all, as I have told you, and our first act together was to go to Cliffside, and put Claude Clinton in irons, and in prison.

"Then I started North after you, and in a bundle of private papers, taken from the desk of Eve Clinton, I found the secret of her control over her husband; it was the blood-stained record."

CHAPTER XLI.

AT LAST.

AFTER a long pause, in which Clarence Erskine did not raise his bowed head from his hands, and Eve never changed her stony stare upon Mark Leslie, he continued:

"That Eve Clinton left her first home because she was unhappy, I well believe; that she admired, but never loved, Claude Clinton, I also believe, and had he been a different man, who would have led upward and not downward, this fearful life history, in which the heart history of a wicked man and woman is laid bare, would not have to be told.

"Taking advantage of circumstances turning up in her favor, and blindly following a lucky fortune, Eve Ainslie went on until she sinned against the only man she ever loved—you, Mr. Erskine—and with the power in her hand to prove Claude Clinton guilty of murder, she laughed at him, while she boldly stood up before God and man and entered upon a false marriage.

"Her love for you, Mr. Erskine, strong as I believe it is, was no excuse for her doing you this wrong."

"No, no, no," groaned the unhappy man.

"Now let me tell you more of Claude Clinton, for there is much to say of his evil, inhuman course.

"By a strange accident, I met, on my way to Cliffside, to satisfy myself fully regarding the identity of its master, an old negro, Buck, by name.

"He was wounded, suffering, and had hidden for weeks in the swamp, afraid to come out for fear of his life.

"From him I heard the startling story, of how his master, Claude Clinton, had sailed from home one afternoon, intending to run down the coast to the city.

"He alone had accompanied his master, and that they had put into the pier at Wildidle, where Claude Clinton had landed, meeting there Miss Eve Erskine, as she was called.

"Though standing off and on in his boat, Buck said that a stormy interview seemed to be taking place between Claude Clinton and his fair companion, which ended upon the approach of Colonel Erskine.

"That night his master stayed to tea at Wildidle, and sailing off late, the wind freshened and they have to, to take a reef in the sail.

"While thus engaged, a small boat passed, in which was Captain Lambert, of the Eaglet, who spoke to his master.

"Shortly after a larger boat, following in the wake of the gig, went by, having in it but a single occupant; but it did not stand on into the shore toward Wildidle, but ran down the lee coast, as if merely for pleasure.

"Then his master put back again to the Wildidle pier, and landing, told him to await him there, ready to start at a moment's notice.

"Claude Clinton was gone about fifteen minutes, so the negro said, and returned hurriedly, shouting:

"Get out of this, sir; quick! do you hear?"

"Buck obeyed quickly, for he knew what his master was in anger.

"As they stood out of the bay, Claude Clinton came aft to where Buck sat, and the negro said, as he caught sight of his right hand, still grasping a knife, stained from hilt to point:

"Massa, am you killed anybody, 'ka'se your knife an' han' be all bloody?"

"That discovery seals your doom, my man," cried Claude Clinton, and he made a blow at the negro's head, which cut a terrible gash and stunned him.

"When he recovered consciousness he was in the water and nearly strangled; but, being a bold swimmer, he took his bearings, and managed to reach shallow water, a mile distant.

"From here he dragged himself to a lonely hut he knew of in the swamp, a retreat for deer-hunters, and in that place he spent weeks, for the next night he crawled to the plantation and lay in wait until he saw a fellow negro, his best friend.

This man supplied poor Buck with edibles, and though they plotted together they knew not how to go about having Claude Clinton arrested, and they stood in deadly fear of him."

"Thank God that Howard Moulton is acquitted of murder," said Clarence Erskine, without raising his head.

"And I thank God that another crime is fastened upon Claude Clinton," said Eve, in a voice hoarse with feeling.

"But this was not all that I learned from poor Buck. He it was who sailed his master one night to a point of the coast near Wildidle, and awaited for him one hour, when he returned hastily and put back home, arriving at Cliffside just before day-break.

"That night Claude Clinton was dressed as an army officer; and, hence, the man who killed Paul Laurence in a duel is found at last."

"Yes, at last," echoed Eve; but it was all that she said, and she still sat like a marble statue. Clarence Erskine still remained bowed in grief.

CHAPTER XLII.

DRIFTED APART.

THE silence that followed the story of Mark Leslie was one that was oppressive to all, and each heart was sorrowing deeply; the brain of each of those three was busy.

At length Eve, with a mighty effort at self-control, arose and approached Clarence Erskine.

Softly the tiny hand was placed upon the bowed head, and sweetly-toned was the voice that said:

"Clarence."

"What is it, Eve?" answered Clarence, in a husky whisper.

"I am going away."

"Whither would you go, Eve?"

"I know not, I care not. I only know that I am going away forever."

"Eve," and the man arose to his feet, his face pallid, his lips trembling, "Eve, for love of me you have done this sin, and I forgive you. From this day our lives must drift apart, and yet you must not come to want—no, I will provide for you."

"Clarence Erskine, were I dying of want this moment, I would not save my life at your expense."

"No, no, no; I have loved you with all my heart; this very moment you are the only idol of my life—but we must drift apart, and forever."

"It is hard, Eve, very hard; but it must be so—"

"Permit me to break in upon this sad scene, said the deep, stern voice of Mark Leslie.

"Well, sir?" simply said Clarence.

"The mother of this lady had much to make her miserable, and she hated her daughter because she reminded her of her husband who had so cruelly wronged her; but now her heart is open to her child, and she will receive her again into her love—nay, she is now in this city awaiting the result of my visit here.

"Also, neither you nor your mother need know want, for your father, Colonel Roslyn Roselle—"

"God in heaven! what do I hear? Was Roslyn Roselle the father of Eve?" cried Clarence Erskine, his whole form trembling with emotion.

"Yes, sir, he it was who deserted his wife and child—"

"Oh, God! how terrible is thy retribution! Hold, sir, and you, Eve, listen, for I have a story to tell.

"Eve, between you and me there is a grave—for I killed your father! He it was who had, as I believed, destroyed poor Florice, and though he had gone through with the farce of a marriage, now I know that he deceived her, and his blood weighs less heavily upon my soul, for he deserved death at my hands."

Overcome by his emotion, Clarence Erskine again sunk back in his seat, while Eve said, in a voice a little above a whisper:

"Clarence, I witnessed the duel between you and the man I now know to have been my father. I kept it from you, but I saw him fall; I beheld God's rebuke upon the taking of human life, and I fainted, or was stunned by the lightning—which, I know not.

"When I recovered consciousness you had gone; but a blood-stain—my father's blood—yet stained the greensward, and upon the grass I found a letter addressed to Colonel Roslyn Roselle, and signed Florice. As this gentleman has my private papers, found at Wildidle, he can produce it. Now you know all, Clarence; but, sir," and she turned to Mark Leslie, "I cannot go to her who calls herself my mother, and I will not; let her go her way, and let her revel in Colonel Roselle's fortune, for not one cent of it will I take; it would burn my very soul, for I abhor my unnatural parent. No, I will go my way alone."

"Pardon me, but I must remind you that there is a charge against you which the law of the land will not overlook," said Mark Leslie.

"And that is—"

"Bigamy!"

Instantly a prison cell flashed before the mind of Eve, and she tottered back as though about to fall; but recovering herself, she said, harshly:

"I am your prisoner, then?"

"I regret that it is so; but I do not desire to persecute you, and I feel that Mr. Erskine will not prosecute; so I will give you your freedom—upon one condition."

"Name it."

"That you appear as a witness against Claude Clinton."

With a bound Eve faced Mark Leslie, her eyes blazing, her form tremoring, and her lips nervously twitching.

"Gladly, oh, gladly, will I do so, for to Claude Clinton I owe all that I am—a vile, dishonored woman, and with joy inexpressible, I will see him on the gallows. Oh, yes, I'll be a witness against Claude Clinton."

Then, with a stifled cry, Eve fell back upon a divan in a deep swoon.

An instant Clarence Erskine gazed upon her, and then turning to Mark Leslie, he said:

"It is better so; when she recovers she will be calm. I will send her maid to her; but, sir, please be kind to her, and if you can prevail upon her to take a support from me, please do so."

"Now let me thank you for opening my eyes, even if I see only a grave in my heart."

Clarence Erskine turned toward Eve, stepped forward, as though about to press his lips to hers, and then waving his hand, as though pushing off a hideous phantom, he left the room, and the twain had parted forever.

CHAPTER XLIII.

SENTENCED.

CLAUDE CLINTON paced to and fro in his lonely cell—the bright sunlight, trilling birds, the green fields, restless waters, and busy life without; darkness, chill, despair and gloom within.

It was the same cell from which, a few weeks before, Howard Moulton, condemned to death, from circumstantial evidence, had gone forth a free man, released by the persevering determination of Mark Leslie to track Claude Clinton to the gallows.

Released with the shadow of dishonor removed from his name, to again return to his sailor life, and become the commander of the Eaglet, the inheritor of Burt Lambert's wealth.

Pacing to and fro that lonely cell, Claude Clinton's brow was as black as gloomy thoughts could make it, his lips as stern as desperation could stamp them, his eyes as wild as despair could render them—for the day before he had been condemned after a fair trial by a jury of his peers, to die upon the gallows—the same death, to save himself, he had intended for poor Howard Moulton.

Gradually the damning evidence accumulated around him, until it was proven, by Eve and the stained record, that he had slain the old clergyman of Silver Creek church—by Mark Leslie that he had attempted his life, and then that he had shot to death, in the disguise of an Indian, the old miner, Clarendon, whose name he took, to seek other fields, after deserting one whom he had cruelly deceived with a mock marriage.

Then, as though from the very dead, from the bottom of the sea, arose Buck, the old boatman, who told his simple and truthful story, which cleared up the mystery of Paul Lambert's death, in the masked duel, and proved that the storm had not swept him from the boat, but that he had been struck down by his cruel master, to hide the secret of his assassination of Captain Lambert.

The evidence was too truthful, too damning for an avenue of escape by any technicality of the law, and Claude Clinton went to his gloomy cell, a felon, a murderer, condemned to death.

Bitterly through his busy brain rushed all these damning memories, and he ground his teeth together, as he felt that a few more suns and his sands of life must run out in ignominy.

Presently steps resounded down the corridor, and a key grated in the iron door.

The prisoner stopped in his walk and eyed savagely the opening door.

"A lady and gentleman to see you," harshly said the jailer, who had no sympathy for the quadruply-dyed murderer.

The next moment in stepped Mark Leslie and Eve.

"Ha! you, who have sworn my life away, now come to mock me?" he said, sneeringly.

"No, Claude, I have come to say to you farewell. You it was who made me a woman without a heart, and now I am avenged."

"But, Claude, I was brought up in the Roman Catholic church, and now I turn in my despair to my religion, for within the walls of a convent I will pass the remaining days of my life—for I gladly give up the world and all its sorrows."

"And yet I would ask you to forgive me for all I said to bring you here—I would not have you die cursing me as your murderess."

"Ha, ha! There is some joy left for me yet, for I do curse you now, and I shall curse you with my last breath. Begone, woman! Pollute not this felon's cell with your accursed presence. Begone, I say!" and the maddened man clenched his fists most threateningly.

The beautiful eyes filled with tears, the graceful form shrunk away, and the iron door shut Eve forever from the sight of Claude Clinton.

CHAPTER XLIV.

IN DEATH'S ECLIPSE.

AT last the day of execution rolled round; the town was all excitement, for common natures always love to satiate their gaze upon human misery and suffering.

The gallows had been erected in an open field, outside the corporation limits, and thither rushed the mob of that Southern town, awaiting in breathless eagerness the rising of the curtain upon the "death scene," the lowering of it upon the *finale*.

Then a rumor gained ground that Claude Clinton was not to become a spectacle for the eyes of the horror-hungry populace; it was said he was dead.

Mark Leslie came out of his hotel pale, stern and cold, and the rumor reached his ears.

Instantly he changed his intended course, and hastened away toward the jail.

Here was congregated an excited crowd of officials, and through them Mark Leslie forced his way into the gloomy corridor, for, being recognized as a Government detective, he was permitted to pass.

At last the prisoner's cell was reached, and passing in through the iron portal the eyes of Mark Leslie fell upon the form of Claude Clinton, lying prone upon the cot.

"He is dead, sir, and by his own hand," said the jailer.

"Dead! A suicide!" and Mark Leslie dropped the lifeless hand.

"Yes, sir; here is a small bottle containing poison, and this note, to you, sir, I took from his hand."

Mark grasped the note and read, written in lead-pencil:

"Mark Leslie, you are avenged, for you have driven me to my death. CLAUDE CLINTON."

A wild light flashed into Mark Leslie's eyes, a flash of triumph, and then he turned and walked away, for his duty had ended; his sister Louise and Eve were avenged.

Back to the hotel he wended his way, and Eve learned from his lips that Claude Clinton had died by his own hand.

For awhile her head drooped in grief, and then rising she held forth her hand to Mark Leslie and said, sadly:

"For all you have done for me I thank you from my heart."

"Now the end has come, and henceforth our paths in life divide. Farewell."

CHAPTER XLV. CONCLUSION.

YEARS have passed away since Claude Clinton's death, and those characters of my story are drifted far apart.

Side by side with his loved wife and idolized daughter, Florice, sleeps Colonel Erskine, whose last days of life were closed with bitter memories of the past.

In shoddy magnificence, still clinging to life with tenacious grasp, is an old woman, living upon the wealth of Roslyn Roselle, who won her girlish heart to afterward deceive and desert her—that pitiable skeleton of womanhood is Matilda Roselle, the mother of the heroine of this story.

Flitting hither and thither through the length and breadth of the land, ever restless, is Mark Leslie, an old bachelor, and still in the detective service of the United States, and in which he has won rank and distinction, for, though possessing wealth he could never be prevailed upon to settle down to the enjoyment of the pleasures of life.

In Cliffside, once the home of Claude Clinton, which he purchased when offered for sale, lives Captain Howard Moulton, with a lovely wife, the daughter of the lawyer who aided Clarence Erskine in his defense, and the pompous *Major Domo* of the estate, notwithstanding his gathering years, is Buck, the boatman, who believes that Fred Douglass and himself are the greatest personages of the African race now sheltered by the stars and stripes.

A lonely, wretched man, alternately roaming over the world, and then resting in his grand old home is Clarence Erskine—a moody, silent and stern man, only awaiting the summons that will call him beyond the tomb.

One more, kind reader, and my long story is finished—that one, Eve, whose strange career you have kindly followed in imagination through the romantic realities of her life.

Upon the wave-washed shores of a Southern State stands a lordly building—a convent, whose sacred walls exclude the world from those who dwell there.

In that holy retreat dwells the woman once called Eve Ainslie, but now known as *Sister Evangeline, the Nun*.

With the dead past buried, the world cast behind her, she has devoted her life to God, and those of her sisterhood who have felt the light touch of her fingers soothing the fevered brow, gazed upon her *epi-rituelle* beauty, and know not her past life, would never dream that Sister Evangeline, the Nun, had ever been a woman *without heart*.

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